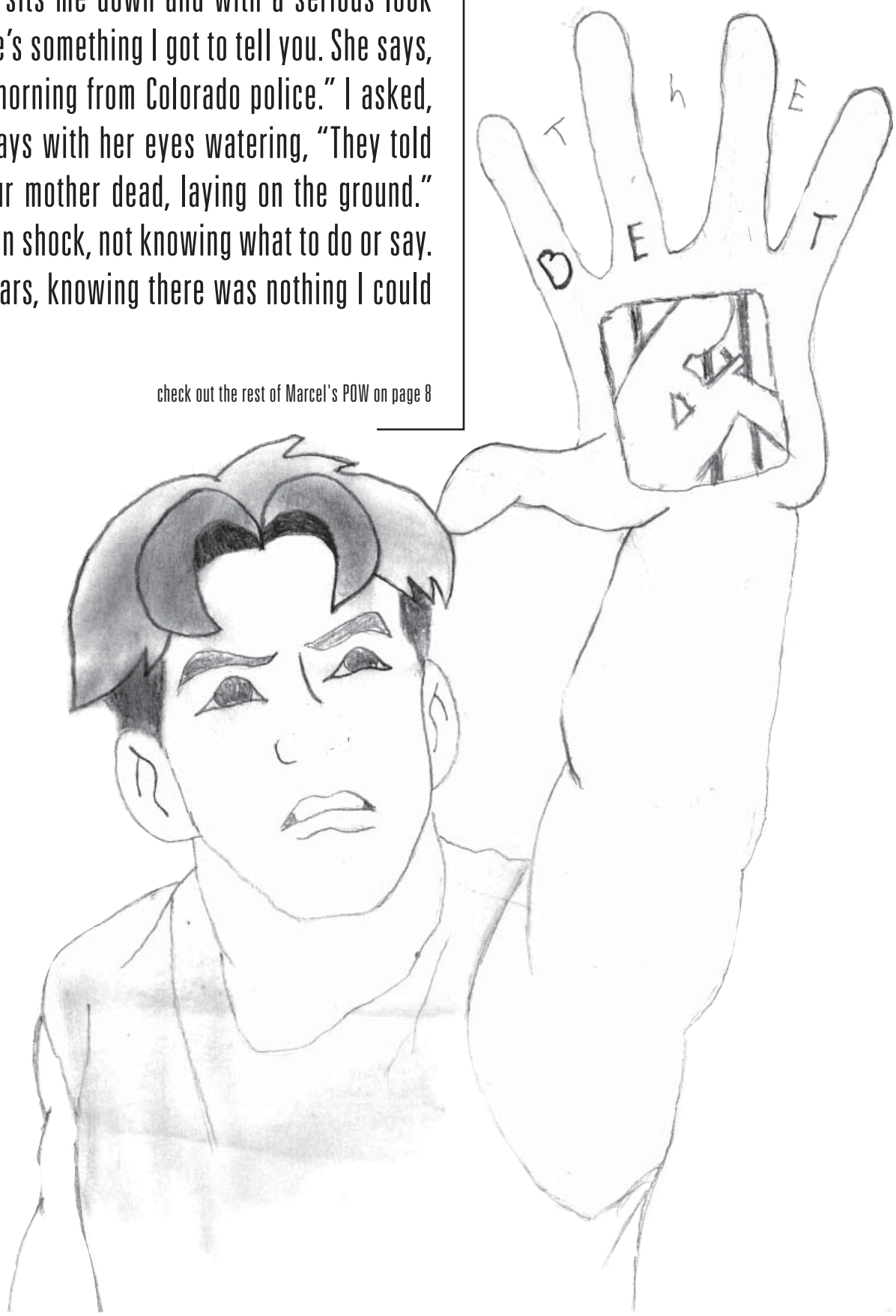
My foster mom sits me down and with a serious look tells me, there's something I got to tell you. She says, "I got a call this morning from Colorado police." I asked, what about. She says with her eyes watering, "They told me they found your mother dead, laying on the ground." My heart dropped in shock, not knowing what to do or say. I broke down in tears, knowing there was nothing I could do but cry.

check out the rest of Marcel's POW on page 8



editor's note takes in random observations and reflections about the beat piece of the week co-pieces of the week standouts weekly winners honorable mentions and the beat without editor's note contest

EDITOR'S NOTE VOLUME 11.23

No time to waste with the usual Beat rant, it's time to get a new voice to do the duty. We're bringing back our man Roy, who has been a primetime Beat player for a number of years now. Roy is not only the fastest typist in the office he's also a damn good facilitator and editor who really, really cares about this work. It's an honor to give him the floor, take it away Roy!

What it do Beat writers? This is your boy, Roy Hodgson, and I'm writing to y'all for a change, so just sit back and peep the following....

So many times I read in The Beat youth talking about how "they've done this, they've done that" and to me it sounds like they're all trying to live too fast and act all grown-up. I remember those days when I was like that myself. I remember when I was 13; people would say I looked like I was 15. When I was 15, people would say I looked like I was 18. Then, when I turned 18, people said I looked like I was 21. Now that I'm about to turn 21 in the fall, I wish I was 13 all over again. What I'm trying to say is: Y'ALL NEED TO SLOW DOWN! Enjoy being your age because you're only 13, 14, etc. once. When you're young, you can just hangout and not have to worry about paying bills and putting food in other people's mouth, unless you're one of the unfortunate youth who are forced to hustle or work at an early age because if you don't, then no one eats at home. We feel sorry for you and we regret that your family life isn't like the one depicted on "The Brady Bunch." However, don't lose hope. The easiest thing to do in life is quit. Show that you're more than just a quitter and know that there's always a light at the end of the tunnel.

Too many of y'all get caught up in what you see on T.V. and what you hear in music and y'all want all that. You see the ice, the fly clothes, and the flashy cars, and y'all want everything right now when y'all really have to wait y'all turn. I was very fortunate to have never gotten caught up in gangs and I always had a good head on my shoulders, so I spent my entire adolescence on the outs. Y'all should be doing the same because life is not meant to be lived behind bars. It's sad when I see fools who are 22-25 and are back on the outs after doing some time, yet they're still young-minded because when they got locked up, they were young and even though their bodies might have grown-up, their minds never caught up with their bodies.

Now, let's talk about drugs. Drugs mess up a lot dreams. Yeah, smoking that purp may taste and make many of you feel good, and my advice is to just lie off it period, but if you're going to smoke and you're going to drink, then do it at the right time. Don't do it during school time when you should be filling your head with brain cells rather than killing them off. Don't do it while you're driving a car because DUI's are no joke. Trust me; I know firsthand. Do it after you've finished your homework, finished with your chores, whatever. Just don't do it while you're supposed to be handling your business. Also, if many of you don't know, if you ever plan on holding a legit job, then chances are, you're going to have to take and pass a drug test to get hired, so you'll have to make a decision. What do you like more: Making money or getting high? I made the mistake of having my mind focused on drugs and drank when I was in high school. In fact, my high school years are a blur. When it was time for me to graduate, I had to hustle for my credits. Even though you may front all you want and say, "I don't give a damn about college," it does kind of bother you, at least it bothered me, when you see other kids talking about they're going to go to big-time schools and leaving the area or state and doing big things while you're staying behind. Come on now, cousins. Just like when you have a very successful family member who is doing big things and your family asks you why you're not doing the same, it does bother you. That's why I encourage y'all to get your acts together and strive to go to college. Trust me; college life can be very fun! (Wink, wink!)

It also bothers me when I read my fellow Latinos writing in The Beat talking about how they bang this or that. It is a shame whenever a youth loses his/her life so young over ignorance. Your parents/elders didn't come to this country just so y'all can mess up or get killed over a stupid color. I've had the good fortune of going back to my family's country several times and every time, I come back more humbled than the last time I went. When you see the kind of life you would be living if you lived over there, you'd realize it is time for you to stop with the bullshhh because many of those kids would love to trade places with you in a heartbeat....Also, for those of you who don't have any papers, estado en una pandilla no va ayudar sus oportunidades a recibir sus papeles (being in a gang won't help y'all chances to receive y'all papers) especially the way things are headed in regards to immigration in this country.

I'm not saying all this because it is the politically correct thing to say or because the other editors pressured me to write this. I'm saying this because this is the truth. Maybe y'all have read my response in your piece: "There is over a 1,000,000 people out there trying to reach the top of the ladder. So many people fall off because they get greedy. The world wasn't built in one day. Wait your turn, work hard, and you'll see your efforts pay off." Ask yourself: How many people are out there slanging drugs? Plenty. How many people are out there pimping? Many. There's a ton of competition. Now there are Cannibus Clubs, so lots of people go there rather than going to their neighborhood drug-dealer, so the business is not as profitable as it was back in the day. Also, there's a lot of "funny" drugs out there. Y'all know what I mean. The only people making any real money are people pushing big weight, and when you're pushing weight, if you get caught, goodbye. All those foot soldiers out there slanging need to stop because they are slanging for crumbs, and when they caught, most of their money will go towards paying for bail or for attorney fees. You may say your big homie or your connect is doing it real live, but for every 100 out there making it, there are 10,000 wishing they had never started.

All right, I'm about to put this Ed. Note to an end. Maybe after reading this, you might think I'm full of crap, and maybe I am. Others might not want to read this through. Awww, does the truth hurt? Many people can't stand the truth because they don't want to hear it or they manipulate what the truth is in their heads.

I just graduated from City College last month and I now hold an A.S. degree in Hotel Management. I'll be damned if anyone belittles what I've accomplished. Maybe it's not a Harvard degree, but damn it, I worked by butt off for it and I spent long nights and stressful days striving to achieve it. Don't sell yourselves short. Living "the game" is an illusion and it's a trap. Honestly, how hard is it? Go to school, behave yourself in class, do your homework, and pass your test? Is school really that boring? Is learning really that boring? Even rappers have to pick up a thesaurus every now and then to add to their repertoire. I'm going to continue doing what I'm doing and I don't care if people call me a "square" or a "loser" because I know what I am and I know what I'm not and I don't need the next person to accept me in order for me to feel good. Whatever the next person says isn't going to make me or break me. If that were the case, I probably would have never graduated from high school. All right, y'all. I hope y'all marinate on what I just wrote and make a change in your lives.

Remember: A cop's job is to protect and serve and arrest those breaking the law. The D.A.'s job is to protect the community and prove people are guilty of breaking the law. The judge's job is to sentence people who break the law. Your job is to stay as far away as you can from these people! Stop letting the system pimp y'all and start doing something positive with yourselves.... I know I am.

Feel that! We sure did. Thanks a bunch Roy for lacing us with your thoughts. Damn! All right, all right, let move on to the topics at hand...

The first topic is, "Invisible Tattoos" -Every tattoo has a story behind it, as does every scar. Many of you have at least one or two scars or tattoos that are visible to the world. But all of us have many, many more that are invisible — things that have hurt us or impressed us enough to leave a mark on us internally, but that don't leave any outward signs. These are the marks that even if you were standing naked before us, we could not see. These are for you, and you alone, to describe. So look inside your heart and soul, and tell us about those invisible tattoos.

Our second topic, "My Life Changed When..."

And our last topic, "Wow! There I Am In The Movies!" -Have you ever gone to the movies and, boom!—there you are and/or your life story right up there on the screen? If so, what was it about that character that reminded you of yourself? Who was the star that played "you" in the movie —Brad Pitt? Eminem? Andy Garcia? Halle Barry? Jet Li? Was the movie story similar to yours, or just the character in the story? Do you physically resemble the actor? Do other people tell you that "You look just like..." Who? Do you agree with them? Did the movie or character that reminded you of yourself teach you anything about how you want to live your own life, or whether there's anything you want to change about it? Have you ever thought about acting on the stage or the screen?

Now lets respectfully acknowledge this issues POW (Piece Of the Week) recipients! They are Tim from Marin, Slug from Walden House PSK, G-Poet and Aaron from Arizona. From the 150 Crew, Lil' Sam, Big Will, Wayne, Marcel, and Jeremy. From SF/YGC, Baby Cakes, Ques, KK, D-Grinda, and Lil' Lazy.

Before we bring this note to a close, we want to send this issue out to Brittany Bernard who is truly a gem of an office colleague. Her presence is so felt. This no nonsense gal has come a long way from being the poetic participant in our weekly workshops in Alameda County Juvenile Hall to being an amazing colleague and friend whose responsibility in the office is growing each week. We are so impressed with her work ethic. She is not only a clean typist, she is also in charge of our mailing and does her best to see to it that you are getting your Beats. So allow us this week to dedicate this issue to the very responsible and hardworking Brittany Bernard. We truly appreciate what you give to The Beat each week, thank you.

See you next week friends! Best to you all!

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The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our commuities already–we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

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Art: Much props to everyone for the great art this week.

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Writers: Thanks to all the participants in our workshops in the San Francisco's Youth Guidence Center and Log Cabin Ranch School and the Walden House Facility, Maricopa County, Arizona, Walden House, Santa Clara, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, EPA Charter, RAP High School, Alameda County, Santa Cruz County and Marin County Juvenile Halls. As well as Natural Bridge in Virginia, and Hidden TREWTH in Rhode Island. If you have any questions or comments about The Beat Within, or if you would like to become a subscriber, contact us at: 275 Ninth St. SF.CA. 94103 or call (415) 503-4170 or check us out at:

www.thebeatwithin.org

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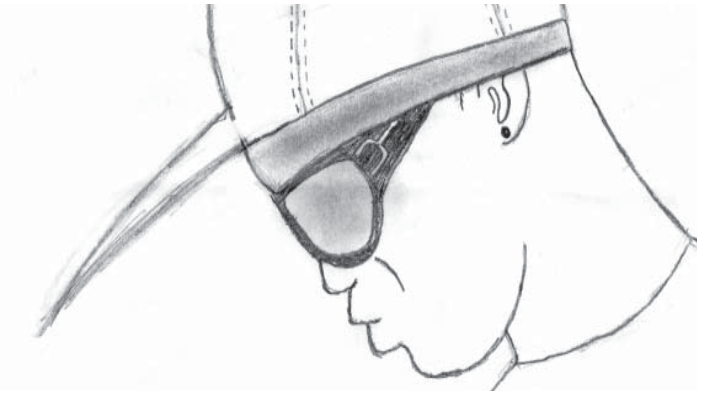


Counselor's Corner

From The Beat: Losing a family member is a very difficult thing to deal with. It's these times that we really need the love and support of those around us. In this next piece Ms. Wadud (a counselor from the 150 Crew) shows her gratitude towards others for helping her get through a very rough time in her life. It's nice to see your beautiful smile again Ms. Wadud. Peace. We send you are prayers and warm wishes friend. Sorry for the loss of your loving mother.

A Difficult Time

As salaam alaikum, Beat Readers. This is just the right forum to express my heartfelt thanks to all the staff and kids whose prayers and support helped me through the most difficult time of my life. My mother passed away on Mother's Day and to say that my world fell apart would be an understatement.

I've done several pieces in the past, so you guys are already well aware of how close we are. I know that your prayers and my faith in God is the only thing that has kept me from falling completely apart.

Thank you for all the phone calls, cards, words of kindness and comfort and monetary donations. I really appreciated everything and I consider Alameda County Probation to be my extended family.

Thank you B2 kids for helping me to smile again. You guys are my strength and the reason I keep coming back.

Love you all. God bless.

-Ms. Wadud, 150 Crew Counselor

PIECES OF THE WEEK

I Am

I am a young black male in the system
I am a young black male trying to get out the system.
I am a young black male who is trying to go to college.
I am a young black male who wants better for himself.
I am a young black male who wants a family.
I am a young black male who wants people to look up to him
and not down on him.
I am a young black male who cares about his people.
I am a young black male who wants his own business.
I am a young black male who wants his people to come together.
I am a young black male who wants to see his people do good.
I am a young black male who wants his people to stop killing
each other.
I am a young black male who wants his people to stay off the news.
I am a young black male who wants his people to stop killing
our own people by selling drugs and guns in our own community.
I am a young black male who wants to see
a young black man in the white house.
I am a young black male who wants his people to stop going stupid on cars because that drama can get you hurt.
I am a young black male who wants to see his people going to high school and going smart in class
so you can go to college and be somebody in life
like a black man supposed to be.
I am a strong young black male
And I say to all my black people: GOD BLESS YOU ALL!

-Lil' Sam, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This should be posted up on the wall in every town, every house, every home in the Bay Area, not just as an inspiring poem young black men like you, which it surely is, but for anyone who believes that we can rise to be more of what the rest of the world expects of us. From the depths of Juvy to the heights of hope, thank you for an incredibly powerful poem. It's not just a poem but a promise you know, a promise you've made to yourself. Keep it.

The Scar In Me

Something that scarred me for life that nobody can see
Is when I got raped in Oakland and lost my virginity
It made me realize the decision I made was poor
But God has forgiven me
God bless the Lord
It's a scar on me that no one can see
No one else, except for me
It changed my life from day one.
I regret all the bad things that I've done.
I would try to rewind time
But I'll never get me to where I am now
And discover the person in me I found.
I don't mess up like before no more
I can finally walk out behind from this door
I feel trapped but also free
This is reality but feels like a dream.

-Baby Cakes GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This is a painful yet beautiful poem, Baby Cakes. Painful because of the terrible experience you endured, and beautiful because it shows the strong woman you are now. Can you describe for us the thinking and maturing process you've undergone to make you know that you can walk out of your trap and be free? How did you mess up before in ways that you won't mess up again? Who is the person you've discovered yourself to be? Thank you for sharing this emotional scar with us.

I want to make something that can get mankind to the point where no man has ever been to.

Tryin' To Find A Friend

W'at's up readers? My name is Marques. People call me Ques Boom, and I'm in the 11th grade. I have a 3.88 g.p.a, and I'm from San Francisco. I'm 5'10" and I weigh 140. I'm telling you all this because I need a friend to talk to or maybe even a girlfriend.

I'm 16 and when I'm out of high school, I'm going to take a trade so I can become a photographer if I don't go to college right after. I want to go to college in the A.T.L (Atlanta...?). When I'm done, I want to get a job for NASA (National Air and Space Administration). I want to make something that can get mankind to the point where no man has ever been to.

I believe that some day I will be able to do all of the above, but right now it seems like I'm not going to make it. But I'm still not going to give up on my beliefs. I say that because right now I am in juvenile hall in San Francisco, and every time I try to look at things on the good side, something else bad happens. I know if I had some help to get out of this place, and some help to find a job or something to do with my time, I can do good. I tried to tell that to my PO, and she said that I would still fail.

I don't want to have to live my life check by check and don't get to have nice things because I can't afford it, or have to spend the rest of my life in prison because when I was young I couldn't get my life right

-Ques B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: In some important ways, Ques, you have already found the best friend you could have, and that is yourself! You have set lofty goals and you are clearly determined to accomplish them. The difficult thing you have to do now is to keep telling yourself that what you're now experiencing now is only a snapshot of your life, and not the entire picture. You have to remind yourself that tomorrow can be — will be — better than today! We're sorry your PO doesn't sound like she's on your side, because if she were, she would tell you that NASA has summer programs for young people who are interested in space. If she won't investigate for you, you should ask a family member or friend to go online and check out what they offer — or just pick up the telephone and call headquarters. We have been impressed with your writing and your sincere desire to change for a long time, so we have no doubt that "if you can dream it, you can achieve it!" Let us know if there is anything we can do to help.

PIECES OF THE WEEK

Life Through My Eyes

I got a cold heart
That's full of fire
With flames that burn rapidly
Eternally scarring my soul
Immortal thugs
And demonic thoughts
A quick scent
Of my flesh when it rots
As I'm still breathing
You're now reading the unforgiving
Whose destiny's to see prison
If I keep living how I'm living
Or acting how I'm thinking
This life I was giving
So I became what I saw
Surrounded by killas, dealas
And gangstas that bust at the law
So I'm ejecting slugs at thugs
Watching thugs injecting drugs
Little kids hungry
With no place to sleep
'Cause their dad's gone
And mama smokes tweak
Armed robberies and homicides
Dead bodies and suicides
This is life through my eyes
Trying to overcome this struggle
Each day I live
Need to feed my kid
so I'm robbing your crib
Couldn't get a job
'Cause I was too young
Living life by the gun
'Cause fools get hung
Where I'm from
What comes off my tongue
Comes from my heart
Through the ink I hold
On to paper
Never underestimate a gangsta
Keep caution
'Cause I speak toxic vapors
This piece is contagious
And laced with something major
Filled with hatred, disgust
And confusion
Pain, suffering, and struggle
That I can't hide
My crazy life
Another word for suicide
But a sacrifice
I believe I was born to make
To protect a hood
And not let the rival infiltrate
Went from elementary
To Durango and juvenile institutions
They say I'm going to hit the penitentiary
And that's not no illusion
If I keep going how I'm going
My thoughts won't stop
This pen just keeps on flowing
I guess I want to be heard
Wishing I was a bird
To fly away from all these problems
But I'm not
So I'll write them out
And let the ink solve them

-G Poet, Durango, Maricopa County, Arizona

***From The Beat:** Words are powerful! Thoughts are also powerful as you so aptly portrayed in this piece. Will you become what you think? Then is it possible to change your destiny by changing the way you think? Currently you are a caged bird who longs for freedom to explore the world. Could you possibly explore the world right now, even in the midst of your current life, through books and through your writings? Your writings expose your feelings of the injustice, death, and destruction of souls happening all around you. You are what you think. Your attitude is what you choose it to be. Were you aware that the Phoenix bird arose out of ashes, symbolizing one overcoming death and destruction? We challenge you to take on a new destiny, begin with your thought life.*

We Got To Wise Up

You suckas betta wise up
Where I'm from that light flashes before ya eyes, brah
Most cats claim to be hype
But nowadays cats is dying over iced tea
It's sad to see ya face on a white T
But you got played by the same trick you callin' wifey
An most likely one of my soldiers sniped 'em
Moms at your funeral lookin' over ya casket, like "who wiped 'em?"
It's hard to say, snitchin' just ain't in my nature
It's bad for ya blood
That'll get ya momma slugged
You betta keep it movin'
'Cause these streets ain't 'bout to budge

-D-Grinda B4, SF/YGC

***From The Beat:** You've got that right, D-G, the streets will not change. Which means that if you want to avoid the consequences you describe so graphically in this very tight poem, it's up to you to make the change. We hope you're telling us about the tragedy of seeing a young friend's face on a T-shirt to warn people (and yourself) to change up, and not just to be more careful. We can't get that image of someone's mother looking at her dead son in his casket out of our minds. It's to her that our hearts go out. And there are so very many...*

A Tough Decision

I have mixed emotions about going to Glen Mills. I mean, it's sound like a good opportunity because it was hella different sports, academics challenges, feel me... basically all the stuff it takes to become successful. But it's hella far away, and it's a mandatory 18-month program — and it's all the way across the country!

I go to Lowell High, maintained an above 3.0 GPA, and this only my second time coming to YGC. I got three jobs waiting for me on the outs, and I'm willing to go to a group home. But at the same time I'm afraid I might mess up. I really want the Mills to be a last resort. This decision is gon' have a big impact on my life.

-KK B4, SF/YGC

***From The Beat:** We've been impressed with you from the beginning, KK, and not just because you like classical music! You have the insight and intelligence to make the changes you know you have to make to be the success you so clearly can become. And the fact that you are afraid you might mess up in a placement only confirms our view that you look at the world through more mature eyes than many your age. Use that fear to think twice whenever the temptation to mess up presents itself (and you can be sure, those temptations will certainly be there to give into or to resist...) All of your gifts are no guarantee of achieving your dreams, but at the same time, you have what it takes to get there. Don't let yourself down. Wherever you go, please write us and tell us what's good, what's bad, and what's going on in KK's life. Thank you for all your writing!*

. . . this only my second time coming to YGC.

PIECES OF THE WEEK

An Excerpt From My Journal

"...I want to start really being honest in here (this journal) about things I hate about my mania and depression and how it... Okay, I dunno. This is weird. It's like I'm telling a real live person and I hate admitting it to people because I feel like I'm giving in to their plans, the government's....plans.

"It just goes back to what (happened) to me when I was about thirteen. The whole realization of what the whole scheme and conspiracy of the government. The pharmaceutical psych drug companies, the 'holy' DSM, psychotherapist, the media, etc. When I talk about this, I've been told, 'That's just your mania,' and before, I would agree without hesitation because they had me convinced a bit... and I trusted them because I felt they did want to hear and they do care.

"At the same time, my mind would be racing, disagreeing, and jumping backwards like it so often does, and saying, 'No, how do they know?' Do they know for certain or is it just them saying mania to put off an insight? Who is to say what is for certain and what is not? Who set up the guidelines for what is 'socially acceptable' and what is not?

"What is normal? A society that kills, burns, plunders, destroys, then turns around and points a finger at someone who even questions this authority, ponders the wreckage, analyzes it, wonders what the heck is wrong with our society that we accept such things to happen on a daily basis and spends sleepless nights working to fix it, working to uncover this scandal and help change, start change in the world, our country, our state, our city, our neighborhood — these people are pointed out, instantly shot up with booty juice, force fed 'psych meds,' labeled only a 'manic,' a 'delusional psychotic.' What are they afraid of? What are they hiding that only someone 'manic' or simply curious, wondering, inquisitive, studied, will uncover..."

"I am a manic-depressive (bipolar). I might be schizo-affective. This is something that I struggle with daily because of many things. Things I question daily to myself, others... It's a part of me, but I continue to question because I have a fight for truth and answers that I will continue to find the question and answer..."

(To Be Continued)

-Slug, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: Wow, Slug, we really appreciate your willingness to share this portion of your journal with The Beat. It is not only well-written, it is honest, revealing, penetrating and deep. We don't know if writing in your journal is therapeutic for you in relation to your bipolar or possible schizo-affective disorder, but it is definitely therapeutic for us! (Plus, it should prove to anyone who has questions that even very intelligent people like you can suffer from mental illness.) We are very eager to read the continuation of this piece, and we hope you are not being medically drugged to keep your insights quiet. If that's the goal, they're obviously failing! Great work!

RIP Arturo R.

What's up wit it Beat? What's crackin'? I have many visible scars and a tattoo. But I also have many scars that are invisible. One of my visible scars, is the death of my lil' homie Arturo R. (RIP). He was one of my very good homeboys.

To me, my lil' homie died for the stupidest reason in the world. The death of my lil' homie really scared me, because of how close of a homeboy he was. I wish he had never got killed, but, as they say, life's a bitch and then you die. Now all I have left is to remember him and cherish those memories that I will never forget. My lil' homie was a down-ass rider, and he was one of the few I really knew that had my back.

His funeral was the saddest thing I ever been to. When I saw him in that casket, I was really shocked by the way he was. My lil' homie got shot four times in the head and once in the leg. They had to put a hat on his head because of the shot marks on his head. When I was at his memorial, I saw all the people that knew and loved my lil' homie. I didn't even know that many people knew my homie. The day of the funeral there were people there that didn't even know my homie, but they were there to show respect. Well, Beat, all I got to say is, RIP Arturo R. aka Lil' Turo

-Big Will, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That is a sad, sad tale. We can hardly bear the number of funerals of young men that take place in our communities these days. Especially tragic are the ones by gunshots, because they didn't have to die like that. You say he died for a stupid reason, but don't say what it was. Really, it's hard for us to imagine any banger who died by gunshots who didn't die for a stupid reason, 'cause this warfare of colors is senseless. Why continue to support it? Why can't bangers realize that every time an "enemy" gets shot, it makes it all the more likely one of the homies on your block just might get popped.

His funeral was the saddest thing I ever been to. When I saw him in that casket, I was really shocked by the way he was

PIECES OF THE WEEK

Locked In My Mind

man, I came up from rubble
learned to hustle
watching my mom struggle
grinding robbing people tryin'a make the money double
putting my life in jeopardy forget it i had to bubble
didn't understand that my actions would lead to trouble
mom's always at work
so i had nothing but time to get into dirt
felt like i had to prove something to the turf
taught to show no remorse to people you hurt
felt like i was the man banging my town
absent-mindedly putting a target on my chest
always angry but i didn't show emotion
the street life is where i put my devotion
replayin' tragic deaths in my mind in slow motion
my father was a run out
hard growing up wit' a single mother wit' three siblings in the house
in my life my father almost never participated
spent twelve years of it incarcerated
couldn't bring myself to care for somebody i passionately hated
so with the streets i became fascinated
never told no matter how roughly interrogated
i've never lost hope
too much self esteem to smoke dope
i've been knocked down but i'll never let go of the rope
'cause now i understand life isn't a joke
so now it's up to me to excel
i'm tired of being in a four-wall hell
i have to make it out of jail
i refuse to be another statistic
that much I can tell.

-Wayne, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You see the past pretty clearly, and that's the hardest part of breaking this cycle that has you paying too dearly for what you merely chose 'cause you were left alone on the street with those who acted like they get that pay and stay famous on the turf forever and a day. But time gets twisted in a youngster's mind that way. The longer you stayed the clearer it must have become that no one really wins in that game, just like all the gangsters say, first comes the laughter, then comes the pain. And in you say, you're still replaying tragic deaths in your dreams 'cause of where you've been and what you've done and seen. You'll make it out of jail, but only time will tell whether you'll fall into that prison living that sets you up to fail within a year, a month or for some just a week after their release. Put your mind on that, and use your intelligence to prepare yourself for another way to get paid where you won't need a gat. Increase your knowledge and rearrange your priorities, 'cause there are so many better ways to prove your superiority to, say, your father for one. Your choosing the broad road to jail abandoned your loved ones just like his choosing to run. Use this time to begin again, the solution lies within. We think you've already begun to switch from a loss to a win.

Freedom

What is freedom?
It is the pilgrims landing at a Plymouth Rock.
What is freedom?
It is our forefathers signing the declaration
What is freedom?
It is manifest destiny
What is freedom?
It is when immigrants first set eyes on the Statue of Liberty
What is freedom?
It was the American's dream, it is the American reality
What is freedom?
It is the sign of our flag waving high in the sky for all to see
It is the smell of firecracker's legacy on to our souls
It is the taste of a cheeseburger, that good old American creation
It's the sound of our National Anthem before a baseball game
What is freedom?
It is being an American.

-Aaron, Durango, Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Freedom is many things to many people, but freedom is never free. There have been many people who've lived before us that have paid the ultimate price for us to enjoy our freedoms. How will you honor those that have walked before you?

felt like i had to prove
something to the turf
taught to show no remorse
to people you hurt
felt like i was the man

Dad

My father started asking me where his phone was, and he said it was in my room. I started yelling at him, asking him why was he in my room. Then he started coughin' as I looked in my room. Then he kept coughin' and started throwing up, so I ran outside to see what was wrong with him.

As I stepped out the door, I caught a glimpse of him falling over the three-story balcony and he fell to the bottom of my building. I didn't see him when I looked, but when I ran down there, he was dead. Then I started to cry, yelling, "Dad! Dad! Somebody help!" Then I woke up!

You see, I never tell my dad I love him, but when I woke up, I almost cried and I wanted to call him ASAP and tell him that I did. You never know how much you need something until it's gone. So don't wait until it's too late. The next couple of days passed and I went to court and he was there, and I finally got a chance to tell him how I feel. Father, I love you and you changed my life.

-Tim, Marin

From The Beat: You did a beautiful job telling your dad how much you appreciate and love him in this piece. What a scary dream. Does your dad have tuberculosis or emphysema in real life? Regardless, your vivid dream was truly a wake up call. We hope by the time you read tis your relationship with your father is only getting stronger and stronger.

Marigold

There is a beautiful flower
That blooms in a concrete jungle
This beautiful flower
Went through a whole lot of struggles
It's this beautiful flower
That learned how to be stable
An' walk on the concrete
Nobody thought this beautiful flower
Was gonna make it
But this beautiful flower
Shows them that she is a survivor
An' she had four seeds
An' they bloomed one-by-one
An' now three of her new bloom flowers
Got five more bloom flowers
An' now this beautiful flower is happy
But at the same time, she is sad
'Cause her youngest flower
Is taken away from her

-Lil' Lazy LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: What a beautiful allegory of a Marigold being the mother, and her youngest, lost seedling. If this poem is about you and your mom, tell us more about this special woman, who must grieve a lot that you're in juvy. You obviously have a wonderful heart for her. How has your being incarcerated affected your brothers and sisters? When you're free again, will you stay planted in your mother's garden or will you blow out of her soil into the wind, wherever it may waft?

Nobody thought this beautiful flower
Was gonna make it
But this beautiful flower
Shows them that she is a survivor

To Lose The Ones You Love

It all started when I was around the age of seven, living with my single mother and sister. My mother an addict by her choice, failed to stay off the streets and that led to me being put in foster care.

From the ages of seven to nine, no sign of father and mother, in and out of drug programs, while I was in foster care. Around the age of nine or ten, mother lost her rights to me and foster parents gained guardianship.

It was hard at first, but I soon adapted to my new home and family. My mother and my sister went to Colorado to escape her probation and I kept in contact with her. Then, my whole life changed on the day of December 19th, 2000. I was getting out of school and I was walking to the home I had been placed in, I walked through the door with a smile on my face, ready to go and play, not expecting what I'm about to find out.

My foster mom sits me down and with a serious look tells me, there's something I got to tell you. She says, "I got a call this morning from Colorado police." I asked, what about. She says with her eyes watering, "They told me they found your mother dead, laying on the ground." My heart dropped in shock, not knowing what to do or say. I broke down in tears, knowing there was nothing I could do but cry.

I called my sister and talked to her everyday 'till Christmas Eve, sharing the tragedy of what happened to our mom. After that night on Christmas Eve in 2000, I lost all contact with my sister. The calls just stopped and months passed. Soon, our number changed and years passed and I finally realized I lost both my mother and sister and there wasn't anything I could do about it.

-Marcel, 150 Crew

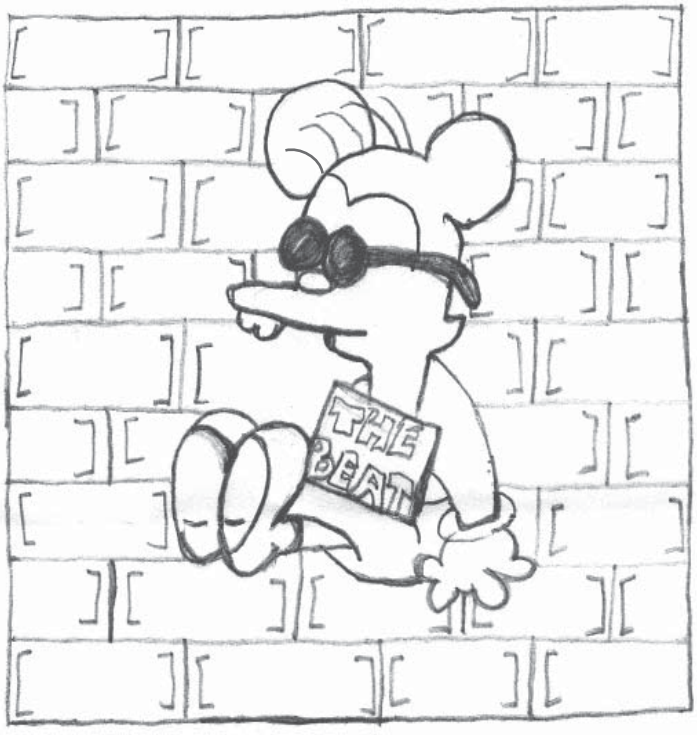
From The Beat: Marcel, what a tragic story. You have suffered a great, great loss. Although, your mother and your sister haven't played such a big role in your life, it's very upsetting/disturbing to lose family. We hope that this experience will only help you realize the preciousness of life - and be grateful for every moment you spend with others, especially your foster family, that obviously cares about you. You can't change the past, but you can definitely influence your future. With love and respect... Thanks for such a heartfelt piece.

Gone!

When I heard that she left me in this world
with out me seeing her
I felt hurt
Gone!
When she left
I felt weak
Not knowing
she was a strong black beautiful woman
Gone!
Writing a letter to her why I was in group homes
Made me feel better
Gone!
Why did you leave me in this world
Without knowing you
Gone!
Every time I think about moms
I feel reckless
And ask myself why
Gone!
I see other people's moms
And I say, what does it feel like to have a mom
Gone!
Now that my mom is gone
I know she will be with me everywhere I go
In loving memory Bohita, 1999.

-Jeremy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Jeremy, your mom's spirit is with you. Powerful and touching piece you deliver for all of us to read and feel. You have her memories and life lessons with you. Live your life responsibly and make her proud. RIP Bohita.



CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

The Scorpio Undulation

Scorpio—sentimental, affection, passion, till high
reach I want reach low.
No matter what the people see, I am I never you'll
know until I write of me
Scorpio—lover, salacious, fettle, emotional, I reaped
what I sow, brighten my rustiness found diamonds
rubies & gold
My fetish led a dream, something too far for people so
they give up on me & until I reach
Scorpio- behind bars of the mind. Key inserted by
heart to open me free... Don't follow me, follow my
dream, my life is being poor
to freedom not given up
Scorpio—lie of truth, truth of lie, lie of death, truth of
"I" I'll precede, most of my disbeliefs, yet of my beliefs
He who became a Prince without a King
His Queen is woman herself of being
Scorpio—Ode...before he...tries making mistakes of
lies
No trust of the mind
Tricks are for kids and I want to play of kind
They maltreat words they...
Become I of a definition
This Scorpio has a book of meaning
The Scorpio undulation.

-Lil Mainy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We like how you close with the title—reinforcing your theme. It seems like you have a lot to say here, and it's a really good poem, but some of your language is so deep that the reader isn't sure of what you're saying. Try to keep a little more concrete language in your stuff and your readers will be even more blown away...good work.

My Life

My life is changing from being here and not home. My mom cried every day about me. Everyone wants me back. My mom ask about me and where am I?

Every night I think I lost my mom and try to find her. She come to visit me every day when I got here. Some people don't get visits from their family or friends, because they don't care about you no more!

I am really lucky my mom come and visit me, and she support me from getting out of YGC. When I sleep, I dream of being at home with my family, and playing with my friends. My life will be perfect when I get out of here. Then I will live happy and not come back here again. That's my life, just a normal kid.

-Isaiah B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Yes, you are really lucky to have a mom that loves you so much. And your mom is really lucky to have a son that understands and appreciates the love and sacrifices his mom has made for him. Now it's up to you to really be that "normal kid" you say you are, and not do the things that let's the system take you from her. The best way to show your mom you love her is to stop doing what you know you should not be doing so that you can all be a happy family again.

behind bars of the mind. Key inserted
by heart to open me free... Don't
follow me, follow my dream,
my life is being poor
to freedom not given up

RIP Bryan

It started off with my cousin Bryan getting his car. After buying his new car, something went on with the man who had the same type of car, same color, same rims, same everything.

The person with the car had got into some problems with some group of people, the wrong group of people. I can tell you that and he owed them some money for some plug they gave to him, but he never returned the money.

So one day they went looking for him, and at this time I was in the car with my cousin going to get something to eat. We pulled up to a stop light and a car rode up on my cousin's side. Then two people hopped out and stood in front of the car with two pistols pointed at the car and out of nowhere my cousin pulled off. While he did that, the dudes started shooting and they hit my cousin about fifteen times and hit me one time right below my knee and all I could say is, I owe my cousin my life, too bad they took his.

-Dre'shawn, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Dre'shawn, this is horrible. We are so sorry to hear about what happened to your cousin. Your life could just as easily be taken. How do you feel about that? Is this just a part of life? Do you think everyone has to deal with this kind of situation from time to time? What can you do to protect yourself? As you sit here in the Hall, don't you think it would benefit you to consider some serious life changes? We don't want to see you end up like Bryan. RIP Bryan.

Didn't have love
Growin' up in the street
With no mom and no one to beat you
When you're bad
No one to hug you
When you're sad

Hood Life

Hard and tough
Didn't have love
Growin' up in the street
With no mom and no one to beat you
When you're bad
No one to hug you
When you're sad
No one to make you mad
So now you're standin' on the curb
Sellin' drugs, robbing the liquor store
For a couple of bucks to buy a blunt
Then smoke
Get high
Then steal a ride
Get the gun
Pull the trigger
End his life, got to spend yo' life
Lookin' over ya back
Can't sleep at night
Because you took the next ninja's life.

-Leon, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Leon, it's sad to say, but this story has become cliché. We hear this story over and over, especially in the Beat. What's the remedy for this? Sounds like without a family you are doomed. What do you think will happen to the next generation? How we can reintroduce "family values" back into the hood?

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

My Grandma

My grandmother passing away is my invisible scar, because she was really my mother. She had me ever since I was two days old, because my real mother was too young to take care of me, so they signed some papers stating that my grandmother will take care of me until my real mom turns eighteen.

And when my mom did turn eighteen, she moved to Texas without taking me with her, so I grew up calling my grandmother Momma, and still to this day I call her my mom.

1997 is when she passed away, and that was the worst pain I ever felt in my life, because she was my mother and my grandmother so that was and still is the invisible scar.

-De Angelo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We're so sorry you lost this incredible-sounding woman when you were so young, it must have been a huge shock to your system. Who took care of you after that? What are your best memories of your grandma? Have you been in touch with your mother since then? Who are the most important people in your family now? Where do you draw your strength from?

His Painful Life

Eating out of trash cans
Struggling to survive
Looking for some comfort
Maybe a place to hide
Thinking of the next meal
Trying not to steal
Trying to make a deal
Trying to express how I feel
Always keeping it real
People lie, but I like to try
I don't know why
But everybody is going to die
On the streets looking for bread
Lost in a maze
Trying to find out which ways
To make it to be free
To get home
'Cause I'm always alone
I'm too far gone out of my mind
That why I'm always left behind.

-Estephen, Durango, Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Living life, lost and alone/ Young one you need a home/ Our hearts break to hear your plight/ You've put up quite a fight/ Struggling to hang on/ Where have your loved ones gone?/ We encourage you to not give up hope/ As in the darkness you grope/ Looking for somewhere to belong/ Opportunities will come along/ Open your eyes and your heart/ Help is available for a new start.

The World of Wars

Light coming from the eyes
On a March, maybe October grey of the skies
The future cracks like the grown of concrete
Wave's enemies, dust of a machine, hands grip the curve of the trigger,
As soon as it gets dark my neighbor becomes bitter
Ready to take my gift that was given to me
Life…growth…death…
I sleep on it, wake in the morning of nothing left
Sheltered of own
Mystery fear of my life becoming gone
Touches come from behind me, I turn
There's my soul following me wrong
My reflection shows the puddle of hope
Vibration of the land I stand before I…
Quiver destruction of the eyes I look in
Stares come huntin' my soul.
Locks from their mane, gold of teeth cracked lips
As I look around everything resembles except I
My dressin' different, braided hair, pearl teeth, luscious lips,
Soft dreamy eyes and a soul at my side
Plus reflection of my hope
"flashes" bodies drop, groans come from the enemy life
he's a monster, ashes drop from my neighbor
clothes soak with passion of blood. Nobody but a gift taken away so quick, I turn in fear, my eyes see a barrow
a masked face
reflection of hope from my eyes
the enemy flees, screechin' car pulls off, sound of a tea-pot ready
to explode
everyone gone, I walk until the night comes
to the lake on ocean I walked until
music of the wind
the smack of the water from its crash
I sit watchin' the sky flash and flash until I see
It's last
Groans surround my area, my neighbor
That was hidden behind an oak tree
Try to run towards me
Flashes maybe one, maybe two, no it was three
Ashes now his body, clothes drop in red ink
I stand in fear seeing the barrow and a stern face turn and flee
There my eye drops reflections more
Therefore I stand in the world of wars

-Lil' Mainy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You stand in the world of wars, and what is your role there? Do you take part in those wars? This piece is full of intense images and takes us to some heavy places. We wonder if you could tell the story/poem from your neighbor's perspective, or even the enemy's. Try it next time and see what happens.

Soft dreamy eyes and a soul at my side
Plus reflection of my hope
"flashes" bodies drop, groans come from the enemy life

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

Daughter To Father

I'm writing to you
Not to tell you that I still hate you
Just to ask you how you feel
And how we fell apart
Are you happy out there
In this grateful world cold?
Do you think about me?
Do you miss your little girl?
When you lay your head down
How do you sleep at night?
Do you even wonder if I'm all right?
Well, I'm not all right
It's been a long, hard world
Without you by my side
Why weren't you there all the nights that I cried?
You broke my mother's heart
You broke me for life
It's not O.K.
I'm not all right
I remember the days you were a hero in my life,
But those were just long lost memories of mine
Now I'm writing just to let you know
I'm still alive.

-Kalisa, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: Although this poem made us very sad, we still have to admire how much you managed to say and hold your understandable anger in check. Instead of cursing out this man who left you and your mother — which we could understand — you've written a very sensitive poem filled with meaningful questions. We don't know what your father (sire?) is going through, but we have to wonder if he isn't also mentally tortured by the thoughts of his past and wondering about you. Maybe one day you'll be able to ask him these questions face-to-face.

Will I Ever See Her Again?

The love of my life, it was kindergarden at Webster Academy/ Elementary School, it was my first love even though I didn't know what love was at the age of six, but I now think back and have many dreams about her and finally come to realize that that was my first love.

When I was 10 years old I saw her again. She said hi to me but I didn't know how to respond, after all of those dreams I had about her and how much I miss and love her I was stuck when I saw her in person.

And now at the age of 16 I wonder will I ever see her again, because I feel I'm ready to tell her how I feel about her, how much I miss her and how dearly I love her. And so now 'till this very day I am praying to Jesus Christ and wishing that I could see my baby "Whitney" again! I love you baby girl and I hope you still remember, love and miss me, because I still remember love and miss you a whole lot!

-Lamarr, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Wow! You've carried your love for this girl in your heart for a long time. We hope if you cross paths with her again someday the encounter will be special. Your sweet loyalty will pay off for you, whether you find Whitney or another woman to love. That young lady will be lucky. Nice heartfelt writing.

Get Rich or Die Tryin'

The movie that reminded me of myself was Fifty Cents' "Get Rich or Die Trying." Why? Because almost everything that happened in that movie reminded me of my life. First it starts with him being best friends with his mom, and soon she was taken from him by death. The same exact thing happened to me. Then he was forced to go live with the family who he hated the most, because he knew he wouldn't be treated equally and how his mom used to treat him. So now he was forced to grind just to make money to support himself. That movie is the same exact way I'm living right now.

When I was twelve my mom passed away and I was forced to live with the side of my family that I hated the most. I couldn't get things I really wanted, whereas if my mom was here I would have got it without even asking. So now I was forced to do whatever I had to do to get money to support myself. Many people tied to stop me from doing what I was doing but I didn't listen because the money was good.

But besides the fact that I was doing illegal things to get money it, it was a way to relieve stress from the fact that my mom was dead forever. To this day I'm still stressed out over that. I will never be at ease.

Life for me is now and it will always be a roller coaster ride.

-Lil' Regg, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is such a smart, tragic and thoughtful piece. A lot of people in your position haven't really looked at their lives the way you have, and tried to understand the way you have. Do you think that this understanding might also help you to find new ways of relieving stress, so you can get away from the negative turns your life took? Do you think you'll go back to the grind? Do you have other options? What are they?

My Invisible Tattoo

A week after my third birthday my father passed away from an overdose. He was a drug lord in San Francisco on Mission Street and had a lot of respect. I wanted to be just like my dad.

As I got older and came here, I realized I wanted just as much respect that he had, but I didn't wanna sell drugs. Even though he did drugs, my mom said he was very caring and nice person and didn't like to argue. That's exactly how I am. But this is an invisible tattoo because I can never get him back and knowing how he passed away breaks my heart. And that's why I love my mom with all my heart because she stood strong with us four kids, plus we got kicked out our house because it was in my dad's name. And she didn't finish school but she managed to find something she was good at and keep at it.

Then she met a man that was willing to take care of us and my mother, even with his low paying job, and ever since then my mother told me to never give up no matter what happens even if you lose something that was most valuable to you. She also taught me to respect girls, like not calling them b----- and h—s, etc. And to never out my hand on a female, 'cause I wouldn't never want a man to put his hands on my mother or sister.

She taught me all the manners you need to know to look like a young man. That's why I'm so sensitive because I was raised by my mom. My step dad was always working but as I got older he would take me to work with him. He does concrete. So now when I get out this place, I know I got a career. I'm gonna keep working with him and go to school at night. Then when I get older I'm gonna do real estate. All this is for my dad because I know he is watching me and he wants to see me succeed, and because this is not a place for me to be and I don't wanna come back. Peace Beat! RIP Daddy

-Juan, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Wow, thank you for sharing your well told and well written story, we appreciate it and hope that you realize your dreams of finishing school and getting into real estate.

Life for me is now and it will always be a roller coaster ride.

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

My life Changed When . . .

Darn, when did my life change?
Was it that night when I was off a pill and hit moms?
Was it the day I met my turn out folks?
Was it the day that man hurt me physically and mentally?
Darn, when was that day that my life changed?
It must have been all them days.
Naw, I know what day it was, it was that day I started havin' sex
It was that day I sold my body for a man that didn't give a damn about me
So that's when my life changed.

-Skittles, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The things you've been through are definitely enough to change a life. You've been through a lot and your experiences have led to being locked up. Is there anything you can do to change your life for the better? As young women, our bodies are the first things the world abuses, and it's so hard to protect and respect them once that happens, but it is possible. We hope you think about changing your life again...

No Longer Wondering

As I grew up I thought I was bad
kicking it with the home boys.
But all along I was wrong trying to be loyal and down
As the days went by the homeboys offered me to get high
Even though I said "No" they asked and asked until one day
I wondered how it feels to get high
I don't know why but I lit the joint up
I was so high that I didn't want to come down
So since that day my life has changed
It's something that I can't explain.
In the rain or in the sun it's not the same without my high
Now I regret for wondering why
and now I wonder how I can get a different high.

-Arturo, Durango, Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Wanting to feel 'great' is a normal feeling. It is how we go about getting that feeling that makes all the difference in our lives. Peer pressure is tough to fight. That is why it is so important to have friends who would not lead us to danger. Addiction is a daily fight. You will need to say "No" one day at a time. Also you need to find an outlet for the difficult feelings you experience, but realize, too, that those feelings...disappointment, frustration, irritation, confusion are normal feelings for anyone to experience. It will be important for you to build a friendship with someone who does not use drugs and could encourage you to make different choices when you feel like reaching out for the old "drug" high. What other highs can you experience? What can you do to cope with emotional downs and stress? Which "highs" will you choose?

Father's Redemption

Love, passion, kisses, hugs
An' crazy sex led us
Waiting for nine months
We didn't know
That in three quarters of a year
The beautifulest baby
Was gon' be born
You wanted an abortion
'Cause you said it was a seduction
You couldn't understand my emotions
'Cause I wanted my portion
That's my blood
That's my son
You don't want it
Let me get it
I know I left you
But I'm back for my blood
Hey, he's a cute lil' boy
I know you don't put no attention
But this is my redemption
Like father, like son
I will never leave you alone
My whole heart, my whole love
It's to you
Baby Lazy

-Lil' Lazy LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Your poem is a very touching expression of the agony a potential father may go through when your girlfriend is unsure whether she is going to have the baby or not, and now you both have your son. We wonder, what motivated you to mess up and get arrested three days before he was born? Who is helping your baby momma with your child, now that you're incarcerated? When you're free again, what will you do to be there for your new family?

that day I started havin' sex
It was that day I sold my body for
a man that didn't give a damn about me
So that's when my life changed.

Does Being Locked Up Make You A Man?

Going to jail doesn't make you a man
because you will be told when you can eat
when to take a shower,
and you have to ask to use the restroom
Also you will be told when to go to bed
and you will have no privacy
And you will have to listen to a staff
or they will take your shirt
and you will have to work your way up to stay up later
and have rec time, so you can write a letter
And be told when to wake up
and told when you can watch TV
and told when you can make a phone call
and to get a drink of water
Also to fold your blanket
and no more than two rolls of toilet paper in your room
and when to brush your teeth
so really...does being locked up make you a man?

-Andre, Durango, Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: You answered your own question..."No." Now we want to flip the question..."So, what does make a boy into a man?" Where you look for examples will determine your answer to this question. The street life offers an answer that leads to violence, prison, and/or death. We challenge you to look at other powerful role models...men who faced adversity and still found ways to live their life with dignity and respect for self and others. Check out the life of Malcolm X, Cesar Chavez, Carl Upchurch and Mahatma Gandhi. These men will inspire you to look at the definition of a man in a different light. There are many inspiring examples of strong manhood with a different definition for what makes a man than what the street life offers. We challenge you to not give up your search for answers.

Baby Love

Today I'm feeling happy
Like a baby when his dad
Comes from work

Today I'm feeling unsafe
Like a baby when his dad
Is not around

Today I'm feeling excited
Like a baby when he hears
His mom's voice

Today I'm feeling loved
Like a baby when his mom
Is kissin' an' carryin' him
On her arms

Today I'm feeling messed up
'Cause it's close to be Mother's Day
An' I can't be with my mom
'Cause I'm locked up

-Lil' Lazy LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Those sweet memories of when you were a baby will stay with you forever. You write so intimately, tenderly from a baby's point of view. You sound like you have a very close, affectionate family. What does it do to your family to have you away from it for so long? When will you be back from being among the missing? Have you learned that whatever you do on the outs to get you arrested isn't worth sundering your family? We hope so.

My Life Changed When

My life changed when I got shot. When they put that hole in me. And I was laying on the ground, bleeding for my life, but I find out I was shot in the leg and not in the head.

My friends run and left me to die! So I stop' messing with them and left them to die, too. When I got shot, my life flash' before my eyes, but I'm okay now — still living, getting money.

Well, somebody shot at me again. I didn't get shot this time. So be cool who you mess with, 'cause the closest person you mess with, will try and kill you!

-Young Quez, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That's a warning we hope our readers take to heart, 'cause if it happened to you, it can happen to them. But why not take the lesson deep? Why choose to go back out and risk your life again in the street? Your next crew may act just the same way. And you can get shot solo bolo, too. Okay? You can't think of any other way to get paid? Thanks for the true story.

they give me nothin' but damn, it seems to me I got somethin'
a voice that's makin' you quiver
poetry that sends you to dreams
eyes that will make you remember

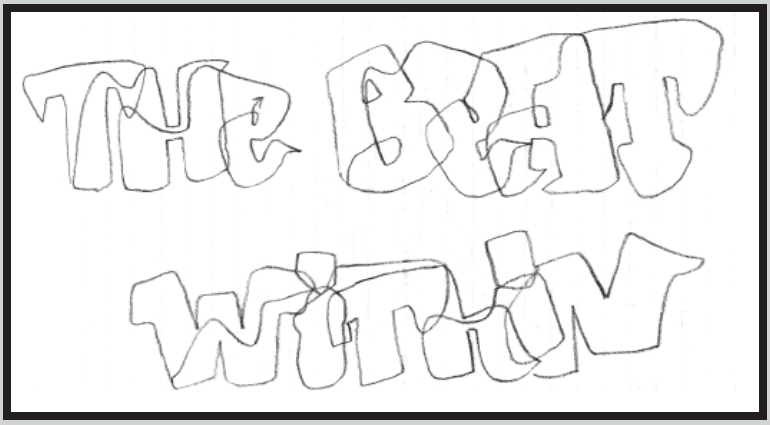
Nightmares

When I get out, I will not act bad. If my mom tell me to do something, I will do it... don't say no, because if she say the police at the door and you don't listen, you will see the police at your door and you will try to run. They will catch you and charge you with more charges than you already have. You should always listen to moms, listen on the outs, because when it is a shoot out and you don't listen, you will get shot.

When you die, it hurts your family. I lost good friends and it hurts me. They all died in front of me. I have nightmares. I can't sleep.

-Shotgun B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You give some excellent advice in this piece, and we hope it's advice that you apply to yourself. As we often say, the best way to show the love you have for your mom is to stop doing the things that give the system power over your life and takes you away from your family. We're sorry you are having nightmares, but it is understandable with all that you have experienced at so young an age! We hope you find a way to do all the things you know you should do so that you can replace those nightmares with good dreams.



They Give Me Nothin' Supposedly It's All I Got

They give me nothin' supposedly it's all I got
but no, I have tears that drop
dreams that's seen everything
my heart beats R&B
my soul sings, I won't stop
they give me nothin' that's all I got
"what"... my voice go with my heart beat
I'm singin' a song from the inter-me
yeah they judge me, thinking I do hyfee things
yeah I'm Lil' Mainy The Prince
but that's all it means
they give me nothin' supposedly it's all I got
yeah night I got dreams to cop
something the world could see, being nothin'... I'm not
I was conceited thinkin' 'cause my handsome face
I could get who ever girl I wanted, being that way taught me a lot
three years from being that way, now I'm handsome but only want one girl faithfully
they give me nothin' but damn, it seems to me I got somethin'
a voice that's makin' you quiver
poetry that sends you to dreams
eyes that will make you remember
that nothin' could end up being somethin' and it may make the mad bitter but "hey".

-Lil' Mainy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This piece has so much going for it! We really like the positivity and self confidence—we believe you have a lot of that something, and you'll end up with more if you stay proactive. On a technical note, the use of repetition is really nice and your language a lot more concrete and strong. Nice work!

No Positive Ending For Now

Really, though, I can't complete that sentence with a positive ending. A lot of people, after doing time and shhh, start changing for the better and stay out. But even after doing close to fifteen months, I couldn't stay out for more than few.

I see my friends and family go through hard times and keep in contact by writing letters. People send me letters repeatedly askin' me to change or just do some things a little different, instead of wasting what are supposed to be the prime years of my life away.

"I hate these places so much," is what I say, but my actions show I love them more than my family and friends. It's hard to change, but not impossible, and we all need to remember that. So you complete that sentence when you are ready. It is a personal thing that you decide. Hopefully you change it for the better, sooner than later.

-Perry, Marin

From The Beat: You're amazingly honest with your latest piece, Perry. What do you think is bothering you, driving you to mess up? Are you ready to complete your sentence this go round and get on with your life? What's your plan?

When I Moved Back To The 'Hood

My life changed when I moved back to the 'hood in Hillcrest, Vallejo, from Glen Clove, Vallejo. I was back in an environment that I was not used to. Being on the block made me change my appearance and the way I acted. Before I moved to the 'hood, I wore normal clothes. I stayed with short haircuts. When I moved to the 'hood, I started growin' my hair, gettin' twisties, started wearin' all the latest Jordans, gold teeth, started wearin' jewelry—big earrings, all the bling. I started actin' more wild, more aggressive, and I guess I wasn't as nice or whatever—I don't know how to say it. I started hustlin', makin' money, and smokin' weed at a young age. Just that little move made me change to the person I am today. My hair is short now, because I cut it in Solano County juvy for my appearance in court.

My mom is sorry we moved, because my younger brother and I started gettin' in trouble, so she moved us all to Vacaville, to a nice neighborhood, so we can stay out of trouble.

-Lew Lew, Marin

From The Beat: You have a lot of insight into the evolution of your appearance and soul, and it seems like you're reconsidering the direction you want to go in the future. It can take courage not to morph into the values and culture of those who live, go to school and work where you do, so congratulations on learning to stand up to anyone whose values you don't share.

Little Pink Book

What happens when you know it's gonna hurt you,
But you can't let go?
Not that you don't want to let go....
Just that you can't
Is it possible that it won't affect you the way that it once did?
Can you do it once and not get carried away?
I don't think I can
I'm torn between lust and dignity
When I do choose
I know which one's right
There's so many ways to justify
Do I give in or do I fight?

-LH, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: The struggle between what you describe as "lust and dignity" is as old as the human species. It is a recurring theme in the Bible. (The spirit's strong but the flesh is weak.) We can't tell you what's right and what's wrong in relation to what you do with your own body, but we can say that holding onto dignity is important. At the same time, we don't think it's inevitable that satisfying lust means giving up dignity; with care, the two do not have to cancel each other out. Maybe the choice "give in or fight" is a false one. Maybe there's a way to "give in" without giving up. That's for you to decide.

I started hustlin', makin' money, and smokin' weed at a young age. Just that little move made me change to the person I am today.

My Life Changed When . . .

My life changed when I hit the 6th grade. I start smoking weed, not going to school every day. I will only go sometimes the whole week. I got bad grades, disrespecting the teachers, and I was selling weed at school. Then I got kick out, went to jail, and when I got out I had to go to another school.

But I kept doing the same thing. My first time in jail didn't stop me. I didn't learn nothing from it. But as I got older and went to high school, I was still doing the same thing but even worse. Out all night, my mom worrying about me, not knowing where I am at 'cause I am out getting money... something she did not give me, so I got it the fast way instead of getting a job.

Then I found out selling weed and coca wasn't going nowhere, so I started robbing banks and started getting big money, getting all kinds of cars, rims, clothes, and shoes all kind of stuff. But now it caught up to me and now I am in jail facing years. But I pray every night asking God to forgive me for all my sins. So if you're still in school, you need to do right and listen to your family, or you're going to end up like me in jail for something, and jail is not the place to be. So try to stay on the positive road and don't go down the negative road like I did or it's go be too late.

-Dre Doojah B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This is a well-written piece that lays out your history. We can see the steady downward progression from the 6th grade to now. But what we can't see is what happens from this point forward. You give very good advice to other young people to stay in school and listen to their parents before it's too late. But is it ever too late? Can't we always make changes in our lives at any age? What do you think God wants from you in exchange for His forgiveness? If you got out of here tomorrow, what would you change? What are you willing to sacrifice?

My Life Is Crazy

From the day I was born my life has been crazy. That shhh is screwed up. But what really hurt me is when I got molested when I was 5, and then again from 12-15. Now I'm finna be fifteen.

Ever since I got in the system that's another thing that hurt me real bad. But life is life. There ain't nothing like life, so everything that happened to me I really don't like to think about a lot.

-Inocente GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Being molested even once is enough to create mental problems for the victim. We can't even imagine what happens to someone who's been molested so many times, Inocente. Even though you don't like to think about it, we hope you have found people to talk to about this, because holding it all in is not healthy. You can do nothing to undo the molestation you suffered, but you can do something about the choices you've made that landed you here. Since being here just adds pain to pain, we hope you choose another way.

I Feel Like...

I feel like a animal
I feel like my whole life being throwing away
I feel like moving back with my pops
I feel like giving up
I feel like I wasn't meant to have any joy in my life
I feel like I felt ever since I was young without
I feel like me, sad and depressed Mcgee
Another day in the "land of the free" to think but not to be
W'at you want to be without passing a test of success
In the eyes of a world wide beast known as the "government"
Peace

-Dante B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This tight but sad poem raises some questions in our minds. For example, what is it that you want to be (but can't without passing a test of success)? We hope the feeling of giving up doesn't overwhelm you. It's obvious just from this poem alone that you have some god-given gifts of insight, foresight, hindsight — an ability to reason and express your thoughts that many others are not fortunate enough to be blessed with. These gifts can serve to take you out of your depression and the circumstances that cause it, but only if you apply them to that task. We hope you do.

I Can Do Whatever I Believe I Can

My life changed when I found out that I can do anything as long as I believe and try. My life always changes after every choice I make, so I might as well make the right choices and decisions. My life also changed when I lost my dad, got taken away from home, got burned, got discriminated against, capped on, when I first beat up somebody, when I messed up my knees, and also when I went to jail. Changes happen, but sometimes you can control it. Over all, Cito gonna be Cito, so life's always gonna change. Cito out

-Cito B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You're right, change is a law of nature and it will take place no matter what! That's why it is important to make sure that you are moving in the right direction. The other thing we like about this piece is that list of events that precipitated changes in your life. We'd love to read a piece about any one of these traumas, from losing your dad (sorry) to messing up your knees. We hope that when Cito is being Cito, he is preparing himself in every wise way for his future because we want it to be different from his past.

RIP Cell

What it do Beat?

Rest in peace to our brother Marcellus. Man, bra, I wish I would have knew the last time I was gonna see you alive.

I remember when we was young I was twelve and you was fourteen. We would stay going on dog and cat missions and since I was the youngest you would always talk me into opening the gates to let the dogs out.

I remember when I was walking my dog and I asked you to hold it and you seen a dog and you let him go I was very upset.

I used to stay coming to your house and asking your mom for you all the time, you would be gone, but Dre would always be there.

I miss you brother we all miss you, but you know all this could have turned out different.

Love you bra.

Lil' Naudie Bo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What great memories you've shared. Keep memories if your lost friend alive by telling them often. We hope by Cell's death that you make better choices with your life in his name.

Invisible Tattoos

Invisible tattoos are not important. Some lie about them. Others write books about them. But everyone has them. Some want to scream them out as loud as they can, and still others want to hide under the covers from them. But one thing they all have in common: they all want to go back and undo them.

They all want to go back and undo them.

-Zoltan B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: What are some of the invisible tattoos that you want to undo?

Getting My Education

Every day I wake up in a cell
Hoping that I would wake up next to a female
I wonder what I did to get here
But it's probably better so I won't have my enemies near
When I'm on the block I'm a walking target
So maybe it was my destination with what I was charged with
I was pro'ly locked up so I can open my eyes —
And realize what I was doin' is wrong
So while I'm doin' my time I gotta stay strong
I'ma get ma education while I'm in here —
Because I know if I'm out there I never will
So while I'm in here I'm just gonna chill
I think that getting locked up is the best for me
So I can see what I want in my future
But I still got love for my block
So while I'm in here I'ma get my education
Then when I get out I'ma be back on the block

-Tha Kid B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: While we greatly admire you for appreciating this time out that might be saving your life, it's hard to understand why you would go right back to the block knowing that you are a walking target! That goal of getting your education should be number one for you, but an education does no good if you can't apply it to your daily life. If you really want to make the best of your time, come home with a blueprint that will get you somewhere in life beyond the block and all the drama that comes with "Block politics."

My life Changed When...

My life changed when I got into a gang. My clothes changed I started doin' drugs, I started catching cases. I started putting in work on the block. I started losin' homies. I started getting shot at. Man, this sucks. I'm out.

-Menace B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Yes, it does suck. You can so clearly connect the dots — from getting into the gang to drugs to lock-up to getting shot — that we wonder what you plan when you get out of here. When you say, "I'm out," we hope you mean more than just the end of the workshop. If you know the consequences of your acts, and you clearly do, but insist on continuing, then you're inviting those consequences to apply to you. The question that we have for you is this: what exactly do you have to show for all the work that you put in on the block?

Hurricane

You don't do it on purpose, but you make me shake.
Now I count the hours till you wake.
With your baby's breath, breathe symphonies
Come on, sweet catastrophe.
Well, maybe this time I could follow through
I can feel complete and start paying dues
Stop the rain from falling, keep my ocean calm
This time I know nothing's wrong.

-Snooks GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We don't usually give standouts for love poems, but this one is so original, and your metaphor so perfect, we had to give you props. We love the line, "With your baby's breath, breathe symphonies." What are the "dues" you need to start paying? We are intrigued to know what inspired you to write this beautiful poem.

Invisible Tattoos

As a little boy growing up, different than everyone else at school, I didn't get along with other kids, really. So because of that, I got into fights and had beef with a lot of other kids from the other side from where I stayed. For that reason, I have a scar on my left chest, right where my heart is. As a kid I didn't really think too much, so I just had to retaliate; then that got me involved in a gang I'm affiliated with today.

Then there's a visible tattoo on my upper right arm, a pair of pray hands, 'cause I'm always sinning, so I'm always needing God's forgiveness for all my sins.

-Chex B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: In what way were you different from other kids at school, when you were growing up, Chex? We can understand how, as a kid, you "didn't really think too much" which led you to do the things which have led you here. But you are not a kid any more, so what are the differences between the way you saw the world and acted when you were a kid and now, when you are growing into young adulthood? How many times do you think God forgives if you keep going out and doing the same "sins" as before? Is it possible that God is also praying to you? Are you hearing His prayers? What is He asking of you? Are you respecting His prayers?

Almost Lost Dad

What is it Beat? You already know who it is. I think my life changed when I was about six because that is when I found out that my dad was using crystal.

I kind of knew about it then I didn't want to believe my dad was a knock. He used to act out and mess up the family by beating on my mother and me.

He used to love my sister. He never did her wrong.

One day my mom kicked my dad out. Me and my sister was in our bedroom when we heard a noise in the backyard. My mom told me to go with her to the back so I did. When I opened the door I seen my dad hanging from a tree. My mom and sister was screaming. I was just stuck didn't know what to do. The man that lived next door heard my mom and came to the back. He took my dad off the rope and saved him.

-Lil' Bizzy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Young Bizzy, that is a terrible memory for you to carry in your heart. We're glad your dad was saved, and we hope that things changed after his life was saved? Did things get better between him and your mom? Did he recover from drugs? We hope your family is happy and whole again.

Help

In the middle of the night I get on my knees and pray,
From the deepest part of my heart I can forgive you someday
Then I can move on and leave you in the past,
Even though what you did broke me like glass.
At night I can't sleep all I think of is you,
I wish you could be violated and feel what I go through.
I hate you, you make me feel so low,
I feel I'm going insane, I'm afraid to let it show.
My memories make me angry, and I feel it's my fault,
I keep thinking of what you did and all the pain it brought
I have to forgive you and set my feelings free,
'Cause I just can't continue to let you continue me

-Tea Etta, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's really hard to process such a painful thing, but we think it's so good that you write about it. You identify so many difficult emotions and it seems like you know that you want to heal. We hope you have loved ones to help you through...and know that your readers here at the beat support you.

Enemies

What do you have pointed to my head?
I'm scared, praying to God asking him if I'm going to die or stay alive.
Is it my time or is it not?
I don't know if this is the last breath I'm going to take
Before this ninja blows my brains out all over the place
This ninja was a friend but now he's a fake
That's why you pick your friends right
I thought I was going to die with that pointed to my head
but I stayed alive thankful to God right there by my side.
What do you have pointed to my head?
I wanted to get revenge but I knew better
Because I would of ended up with a murder case.
You just have to do right and forget about your enemy
before you end up laying face down on that floor.
That's why I did not do anything but kick back.
What do you have pointed to my head?
I do not know this fool is tripping
Tryin' to get me, but it's all good I was not slipping
I'll tell you what, that ninja will not try to run up
That ninja got me the another night 'cause I was slipping,
high and faded, he was dipping and tipping
creeping up in the hood rolling in a E
What do you have pointed to my head?
Are you going to ride or are you going to die
from that click you claim?
Me? Oh no! You want to know why
Because I'm only riding for two people
Ride for Jesus because he always be by my side
as well as my baby girl, just waiting for me to ride
I'm not going to die! I'm just going to stay alive.
That's the way I ride.

-Lil' Man, Durango, Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Is what's "pointed to your head" as much a feeling as a thing? Is the "ninja" more than a person? Perhaps it is people and circumstances that seem to be conspiring against you, willing to harm you. It's true that revenge and focusing on your enemy is not the answer. It's time to do more than just "kick back" though. That trapped, anxious, like a gun to your head, desperate feeling is a feeling. It sounds like you know the street life and hint at wanting to do things differently, so how will you go about that and where will you seek help? Where you go, who you associate with, what fills your time, these are things you choose. Don't stay stuck! Choose peace, look for positive people. Put yourself in situations that will support you having a satisfying life such as school and volunteer work (it counts as job experience). Don't settle for "just going to stay alive." Live!

My Life Changed When . . .

My life changed when I turned into a teenager. It seemed like I thought I was grown. I thought I had figured everything out but young and dumb I didn't know anything. I didn't have anything.

The ones who loved me I treated them wrong. The ones who only wanted to be around me 'cause they thought I was cool 'cause I smoked weed and started cutting class. When I went to the ninth grade my life seemed to go down hill. I started smokin' weed everyday, drinking, cutting class and started hanging with the wrong crowd.

I just wish I would have listened to my momma and everything would have been okay.

-Aleshia, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We all think we know everything at thirteen, it's a rough age. Hanging out with the wrong crowd can really take its toll on your life, but thankfully you're realizing that early. It might not seem like it, but you're still plenty young enough to turn your life around for the better...if you know what you want and do the work we think you'll be okay.

Baby I'm Lost

Why do you leave me in the dust?
Saying why do you have to be going
I know it was wrong what I did to you
like when I walked out the door that day.
But I was stressing 'cause someone was trying to get me
I had to watch my back
Because someone is trying to get me and kill me
I don't know why we live in a world so cold, trying to kill each other.
Why do you leave me in the dust?
So why do you have to be going to Cali(fornia)?
I'm just trying to tell you that I'm so sorry for what I did.
So give me a change to make it up to you
And love you the way I wanted to.
At the time I did not know what love was
but now I do, stressing over you.
Why do you leave me in the dust?
Saying why do you have to be going.
I know you wanted to go to Cali and
I wanted to go with you
but my head was so mixed up from that weed.
So just give me a chance and I'll do it right
If we get back together I promise I will show you the love
That I had been holding on that you left behind for me
so I could love you for ever and ever
What can I do, but love you.
Why do you leave me in the dust?
So why do you have to be going to Cali?
So, so give me that chance that I ask for
So I could show you what I want to do
What I really wanted to do is marry you
that's the only thing I wanted in life
and that's the only thing I want now,
so hopefully I'll find you one of these days and marry you.
That what I want but I'm lost in a maze and you are lost too
We have to figure this out ,so we could live together forever.
Why do you leave me in the dust?
Why do you have to be going?
I know it was wrong what I did to you
like when I walked out the door that day.
But I was stressing cause someone was trying to get me
I had to watch my back because someone trying to get me and kill me
I don't know why we live in a world so cold, trying to killing each other.

-Lil' Man, Durango, Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Sometimes we can't undo what's happened, but we can learn from it and we can move on knowing more than we knew before. Sometimes we have to trust that others are just doing the best they can at the time, just like us. Life has many twists and turns. At each turn there is an opportunity to learn and grow. What can you learn from this situation that can make a positive impact on the way you are living your life? Acknowledging this doesn't make losing someone any easier. We also want you to consider that the greatest impact your actions will have is on your own life and what you get to experience throughout your life. Saying "Enough is enough" is often healthy. Is it possible your girlfriend wanted a safer life for herself and for you? What changes will you make to your life to truly have a future worth living?

From Bosnia to 150

Well my life story starts when I was born.

I was born in Bosnia, Mostar. When I turned one my mom and dad heard that I was coming so we moved to Albania, Kosovo. I lived there for about three years, and when I turned four my parents heard it was going to be a war there so all my family got on the train and went to Germany. I lived there for about eight years. And then Germany kicked us out. Because we couldn't stay there for some reason.

That's when I moved to America, I was only ten, I didn't know anything. After a couple of weeks I went to school and in eight months I could speak English.

Then that's when it all started.

-Willie, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Even in just this short sketch, we get a taste of what sounds like a fascinating life story, full of adventure. Why couldn't you stay in Germany? Do you ever wish you could go back to Bosnia? What are your memories from the time of flight? Was it hard to learn English? Did you or your parents have to struggle to adapt to American culture? Tell us more – our stories are what make us who we are!

Beating The Odds

I'm sitting in here
Thinking of the words to write
Without causing myself anymore strife
That I have already endured
When I know that I don't want to be lured
Back into that mind frame
Crying and shaking like I'm some kind of lame
I know I don't want to be there again
So this time I will win
And not let my emotions get the best of me
But prove to myself that I can be
Strong and everything like King Kong
Only with a lady's touch
And my man will never get enough
Of this strong Black Queen
Even of it has taken me to come back here
To realize that I'm worth everything
And a whole lot more
I never again want to be called a whore
And for that matter a prostitute or hoe
But I know those names will come from my foes
In attempt to make me feel bad
When I look at them and tell them that
They wish they had even one thing that I've had
From wayback when, buried in my past
But I wanna start a new path
So next time they try to make me feel bad
I'll just laugh
And brush my shoulders off to they hatin' a...

-Portia, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We're glad you're finding the strength and confidence you need to start yourself off on that new path...it's not easy to leave the judgments of others aside, but our lives are always better when we think and judge for ourselves. We hope you really do make those changes.

Back Again Mien Boi

I was released happy as ever, been free for five months. Couldn't handle the pressure. didn't take the time for granted. Did what I wanted when I wanted just like a thug trigger happy with his strap loaded. The bad was calling, I couldn't help it.

It feels like it's in my blood to react without thinking. Parents are disappointed, cousins, family, and my friends all are too. I don't want this institution life but I hope I can really change. I'm going to be at camp for that good six months. 'Till pencil meets paper, peace to The Beat you guys are always there for me. Thank you Dave.

Mien Boi, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The Beat is always here for you, but we don't want you to always be here! We want your freedom for you as badly as you do. Please take care of yourself, think always about the next day, and not what feels good in the moment. That might help you shut out the bad calls.

Out Loud

This is for my female on the outs
I just wanna express my feelings out loud
For how I really love her
When I came here my life started to blur
Without her
I just miss the days when we use to kick it
When we go to the park
And I'll see a flower and I'll pick it
Just for you
You remember when we use to cuddle
Taking off my shirt
When you gonna walk in a puddle
But now I'm in here all alone
Tryna figure out what went wrong
I just wanna get out of here
And spend time with her again
And do bad things from now and then
Baby I miss you
I just wanna express my feelings to you
Until now and forever I love you

-Beezie Flip, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Sweet poem. But now, actions speak louder than words. Show her what you mean.

Scars

there are hidden scars inside of me
i'm the only one who will ever see
see the pain it causes me
always these, they will never let me be
forever in my heart, for eternity
you can't see them, at least not physically
but they are there, mentally
i got to live with them, through reality
— envy, revenge, pain
seein' these images makes me insane
live my life on the edge, drive in the wrong lane
i never realized i was the one to blame
— love, happiness, trust
it all ain't there no more, it's more like lust
i'm at the edge, i'm on the cusp
but i have to keep goin', it's a must
i can never let these scars bring me down
not even if i see the images, here the sounds
that keep spinning in my mind, round and round
i escape, but they find me like blood hounds
i think i'm ready to move fast
what made those scars ain't me, it's my past
and there won't be no more scars, those were my last

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

From The Beat: If you can make those last two lines stick in real life, live by your newfound desire to live life right, time (even incarcerated time) will heal all wounds. And even if those nightmare visions won't disappear soon, they will recede, the positive images you can create with that readiness to change with speed. While you're locked up, the changes may mainly be in your head and your heart, though you can share them in your writing and do your part when others seek advice from you, 'cause somehow they see in your eyes some mystery that makes you wise, or they read it The Beat and secretly want to repeat the miracle they see in you in their own lives, too. Keep on keeping on with your progress out of the shackling wounds of the past, 'cause even if the scars remain the pain won't last. The wounds will heal, and you will feel free, for real, inside first — then outside too you'll quench your thirst to be a new and better you.

Truth Hurts

Truth hurts
When you know you been lyin'
And I'm startin' to figure it out
Truth hurts when I'm bein' real
And you steady playin' around
Truth hurts
When you know I really love you
You know I really am
Feelin' like Beanie Siegel
But yo' love is not there
No loyalty no faithfulness
That's what I'm feelin' in the air
Truth hurts
You suppose to be my bonnie
And you holdin' me down
Truth hurts

-Stue, 150 Crew

From The Beat: From what we know you've already worked things out with your girl, so we're hoping this poem is outdated by now, just a memory of a dip in the road that's been taken care of.

I Have Been Here

I been to juvenile hall before, but only in intake. I caught a robbery case, but still only been to intake. Now I'm back in the hall in a max unit.

I never thought I'd be here for something I didn't do. Car jackin' is a very serious crime. I've been here for almost thirty days and how I feel, I never wanna come back. Police sure do accuse anyone for any crime. But this I will take as a lesson.

I never wanted to go home so bad and couldn't, and my parents couldn't do nothing about. Also what bothers me is how they could give you such a long time in jail; and, if you think about it, they give you time just like an adult.

-Andre, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Many of our writers call this "juvenile jail" because of its similarities to adult jail time. Getting accused of a crime you didn't do, is a very tough thing to go through. After your release, don't put your freedom at risk by the things you did do that might have brought jail time to you.

My First Child

My life changed when I had my first child. It changed me a lot, because it made me responsible and a good father before I came in here. I have a little girl that's seven months old, and I love her. When I get out, I'm gonna have to make up every day that I missed being there.

I changed because I have to set good a example for my daughter, and teach her right from wrong. I want my daughter to have a good life and go to school to be somebody. She means the world to me, and I'm gonna spoil my little girl when I get out. It also changed me because I don't want my daughter to grow up without a daddy — that's not fair to her. I'm going to get out soon, and I'm going to be in her life. She's going to live right and I'm go' make sure.

It changed me to be a man and to let her know who her daddy is. I know I've changed a lot, because I'm now seventeen years old, but my mind is older than me. I'm going to respect her as my daughter and give her all of my love. I guarantee that when I get out of here, I will be the best dad that I can be.

-Nathaniel, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Becoming a father, having a baby girl or boy for whom you're responsible, really can change a young man's life. If you never knew how to be good for your own sake, you now have a reason to set that good example for someone you love. And though there's no way to insure that your daughter lives right as an adult, you can give her that live-right upbringing as a child. When you guarantee that you'll be the best dad you can be, never forget that money is no replacement for the presence of a loving father. Of course, every family needs money to survive, but don't take chances with your life (and freedom!) to get it. Every time you get away with it, it's harder to quit — until the day you get caught up for it. Don't hit that first lick, or whatever, 'cause your thinking will get sick quick if you do, and your daughter needs you to stay free!

My Invisible Tattoo

Saludos Beat! Q-vo! Before I get into this topic, let me start by embracing with loyalty, honor, love and respect in full fashion all you Beat readers. Now, let me start like this. Invisible tattoos: Some invisible tattoos that I have are scars that are visible on the side of my neck, right by my ear.

Well, it all started one night, when I was on my home pass from Camp. The homeboys had a telly, so we were supposed to roll up later on that night. As for me, I was at my canton waiting for my curfew, 'cause Camp be calling at ten o'clock to check if you're home. So, right after I got the curfew call, I got suited and booted, ready to hit the telly. So, we roll up and post with the homeboys and some rucas. Later on that night, my homeboy's twin get's hella loaded. He can't handle himself. So, we call his sister, and she comes to pick up his drunk self and take him to the hospital — 'cause he got alcohol poisoning!

So we rolled up to the 'hood, and while we driving, we see some foo' who we got funk with, walking with a ruca. So we park and wait for this vato to walk by. As soon as he does, we roll up and start chunkin' 'em. So. after that little thang happened, I'm in the car, hella tired. I'm thinking that I'm sweating, but when I look down, I notice hella blood on my white tee! I'm like, "Damn! I got stuck!" Well, to make the story short — I'm at the hospital with the homie that got alcohol poisoning now, just a couple doors away from him! So, that a story of a hidden scar, or tattoo, a war wound of mine. Well, with all this said, I'm gone close this with my respect, to those doing time and holding their heads high. Alratos.

-Giggles, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You've already moved on to YA as we write this response. We hope you get to read it, 'cause the scar we worry about most when we think of you (and you know we think of you with caring and affection), is the scar or wrinkle in your brain matter that has you out there funking with folks, risking your life and your freedom (not to mention the lives of others, like your victims) for what amounts to no more than old fashioned hooliganism (that's what they called it a century ago when Irish immigrants were doing the same stupid stuff). It gets you nowhere but hyped up to do more stupid, which you imagine are more bold, things until you get stabbed, shot or arrested. You've sown your wild oats, as they say, no grow up and emerge a responsible man with a plan, when you're released from CYA.

Be eazy it's not just a name it's a way of life.

Seventeen

Seventeen years I done made some mistakes
never knew how crazy it was for your heart to break
Childhood was cut short at an early age
and still, after every thing I been through,
if my life was a story I would be a book with one page
My life is tragic, that's what they tell me
but life is as eazy as it possibly could be
live by my name.
Be eazy it's not just a name it's a way of life.

-Be Eazy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Being easy going is definitely "easier" than a lot of other ways to be, and a lot of times it can save us from hurt or confusion. Are there any situations in which it's harder to "Be Eazy"? Certain moments seem to deserve a more serious outlook...but we agree that being easy is better than being hard.

My Life Has Barely Begun To Change

My life is starting to change when I get out, because I have a nine-month-year-old baby girl at home. And now I'm am behind these four walls crying every night, because I want to see her and her mom.

I can see them in my mind before I go to bed, even when I close my eyes. In my dreams, they are on my mind. When I get out of my bed, out of my cell, I try my best to maintain in this justice system — so when I'm on the court yard I cry a lot but only inside of my heart. I'm just missing my family a lot. So when I get out of here all together and go home, my life is going to change — from my heart!

-Sarillo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Change is an inside job, meaning, it must come from the inside out — from the heart. When you change because someone is making you change, it never really works — like those in here who change as long as there are counselors or guards watching over them but as soon as they are released go straight back to their old ways on the street. Let your heart show you the way, but it will take heart and mind and soul to make that change of heart in here, stay that way out there it the free world. For your little family's sake, and your own — make it happen!

My Life Changed When

Orale Beat! How is life treating each and every one of y'all. Well, I hope and pray life is treating y'all good. Well, this your vato, Young Chucky, wondering how y'all is. Today's topic is: "My Life Changed When …".

Well, to keep it real, my life changed when I found out that my dad that I was living with for ten years, wasn't my dad! All those years, me telling him: Pops this, pops that; when he wasn't!

I mean, as a young child, I didn't want to understand why, and I never tried to, but now that I'm older, I ask myself why really he is not the one who had you but the one who took care of you since a lil' chamaco (baby)? The main thing I think about now is: Where is my real dad? What does he look like? Why did he leave me? I really don't know. I was kinda mad at moms for not telling me earlier. Why did she have to wait till I was ten years old? And that's when my life changed, 'cause I needed some kind of love — and I took the streets where I found some homies gave love and gave me stuff I needed at that time.

But now look where I am! Locked up, controlled by this system. But all I got to say is: any drama or pain you have in life, just stay strong. If not, you'll find yourself in my shoes; and if this is the life you chose, just don't do the crime, even if you can handle time. And just remember who comes and sees you while you're locked up, 'cause that same person, her heart sheds a tear every minute, hour, and day your behind walls in a cell.

But the way I see it, every time I get locked up, is when something bad was gonna happen to me — so Jesus said to me to be cool for a year or two. Like this time I got locked up, one of my homies that I used to be with twenty-four/seven, doing dirt, one of the times we were doing dirt, I got locked up; but he made it home — but the two weeks I was behind the walls of my cell, my mom came on Saturday and told me the bad news: eighteen shots to the chest!

Life is hard, and you will stumble, but try to stay cool. Any stumble you make, if you fall down, you wont' be able to get back up. That's all I got to say. Think about it. One love. I'm out.

-Young Chuckie, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Jesus may have "said" to you, "I'll help you be cool for a year, but after your release, it's on you to steer clear of trouble out there in the street. 'Cause it's just waiting for you to repeat that same old mistake one time too many. Keep abusing your freedom and wasting your time, soon you won't have any. Give up that life of crime. You're old enough now to make your pay another way, and you don't need to pretend all these young G's are you real family — or when you're ready to have a family of your own, your children will be asking, "Why can't Daddy come home? Why he got to stay in jail all alone?" Or, "Why was he buried so young?"

Unforgettable Scars

I have many scars that I can't forget. To me, they're marks of memory. Like I have a long scar on my head that I won't forget. Somebody stabbed me there, and sometimes I still feel it when I get mad.

Deep scars are scars that you get when you did something wrong that you where not supposed to do, and I did a lot of shady stuff. Scars are symbols of life. It's a sign of hard times. Some people won't tell you when they got it because they try not to remember what happened at that time. Some people have personal scars that you cant see, like abusive scars, but I can't speak on that because I've never been through that kind of stuff. But anyway, all scars mean something, like the ones you can see and the ones you can't.

I would like to say something: Stay up, to all in the Hall. I'm at Camp, holding it down. But I've been thinking: Let's fly straight, no more U-turns. We can't get out of jail and go right back! When I get out, I'm going to school. Real talk! I'm Sunny D, and I'm made to shine — the right way, feel me? I'm not the Twin Towers that fall; I'm made to stand tall. So, let's change, before the system or somebody try and take us out the game. Love y'all, and pimp this little time they gave us. We'll be home soon.

-Sunny D, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You're essay on scars opens a door into the minds and hearts of those who carry them. Thanks for the insight. We're sorry you've seen such hard times but glad you've made it this far, survived long enough to see there are better ways to be safe and free in the rough and tumble game of life. And nothing's more powerful than a direct appeal to your squad to recognize that between the system and the street, no one will survive safe and free unless they change how they see they've got to find a better way to make their pay.

When Will My Life Change?

I'm stuck I feel locked up
I know I am and it really sucks
being shackled almost every day
seeing peers get tackled and more and more freedoms
getting taking away
but when will my life change
from gangs, violence, seeing murders and seeing other
really, really bad things?
But I still wonder...when will my life change?
There are ways, but to me the only way to change is if I let
myself change.

-John, Durango, Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Change can even begin while you are in detention. Change begins in the way you think. In order to begin making changes, you need a vision (idea or picture in your mind) of how you want to live your life. What is your vision? What will you do now to begin replacing the destructive thoughts and habits with positive character building thoughts and actions? If not now, then when?

Invisible Tattoo

I got a tattoo of God, and my family is in my heart. I don't really have memories of my dad because he died when I was two years of age.

I do have scars from falling on the ground and hurting myself, but I lived through it. I still am today going through pain that's going to leave a scar for life. But at least I know I'm going to overcome it.

-Anthony, 150 Crew

From The Beat: So much of life is about pain and overcoming it. In a way, after you've truly overcome a painful situation, a scar is almost like a badge of honor, testifying to your courage and strength.

the only way to change is if I let myself change

How Does it Feel

How does it feel
to be locked up
on the real
that's not what's up
some people turn crazy
some people act cool
some act shady
some act a fool
so how does it feel
to eat these county meals
some of the food will make you ill
so stop coming to jail
so how does it feel
always thinkin' you should've done this
but you didn't so stop thinkin' 'bout that shhh
how do you get over comin' to jail
how does it feel to pop a pill
and the same time come to jail
I couldn't tell you how it feel
But comin' to jail doesn't feel good
Stay out of here you wish you could
So how does it really feel
On the real
How does it feel?

-Ally Bo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You strike at the heart of confinement and what a waste it is in this poem – how does it feel for you? Or better yet, when you get out, will you write a poem for The Beat on how it feels back out there in the free world, jumping those obstacles and staying out of jail?

Rich Girl

She buys everything she sees
Fulfills her every need
Just to please
Her disease
She still wants more
And everything she gets
Is piled on the rest
So what's next?
Just the best cash can afford
And all those friends she buys
Are just more toys she doesn't need
She'll have it all in time
But she never will have me

Rich girl, rich girl
Nothings good enough for you
Rich girl, rich girl
You'll be empty when you're through

No, she's never second class
Won't socialize with trash
Flaunts her ass
Since she started working out
She's better and she knows... her parents told her so
She can act- it's a fact- her ego grows
Rich girl, rich girl
Nothing's good enough for you

-Snooks GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Is this well-written but bitter poem directed at someone in particular, Snooks, or is it just a general outcry against the rich? If it's about someone you know, why do you say she'll never have you? Does she want you? What else do you want to tell her?

This Time The Charm

My life changed when I came to jail the third time. I came in here for a gun case and the DA is trying to wash me, they said that I have to go to YA or ROP, but I went to trial and beat my case, so they're sending me to a group home for six months.

That's why I'm going to change my life when I get out, I am just tired of coming here, and I wanna change because of my family and for my own self, when I get out, I am just going to start from scratch. I am just going to start off where I left off, going to school every day and about to get my High School Diploma. I was working every day, taking care of my two sons and my family, and doing the right things, always on task at everything I want and have to do.

-Willie, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's good to hear this, and now we want to know, what's your plan for how you'll get it all back together? Once you get out, all those old demons will still be there, plus the baby mama drama. So who do you have out there that you can lean on while you try to figure this out

My Life Will Change When . . . .

I leave crime alone,
because things will really be different.
I will leave drugs, guns and robberies alone.
I just feel that, I will feel more honest wit' myself.
I know I can do better.
I have let too many of my loved ones down,
I just feel that I owe them back
from them being there for me and being supportive.
I love my family, as well as myself
I just feel that I owe it to everyone to straighten up.

-Guess Who?, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Yes, we agree, you do owe it to everyone, but you owe it to yourself most of all. It's been an honor having your proud handwriting and heartfelt poems in The Beat all this time, and we do hope you'll keep writing, and keep meaning what you write, forever.

Invisible Tattoos

My invisible scar is from 1994-97.

In 1994 my grandfather died of cancer. I was only 6 years old, but I have so many good memories of him it scars me to not be able to see him no more.

In 1997 his wife, my grandma, died also of cancer as well. I have got many memories that it scars me to be without them both.

I got a tattoo on my left arm that represents my daughter's birth. It says Sierra. When I get out, I can get it finished and then it will show the birthdate and will say: Sierra 2/22/05.

-Jeremy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This piece is both heartbreaking and life affirming, because there's loss in it but also hope. Maybe this is just how the wheels of life turn. You lost your loving grandparents way too young, but now you have this new life in your life, a beautiful daughter who will have good memories of you that you can share with her.

My Life Changed When Grandfather Passed

My life changed when my grandfather passed on July 6, 2003. I don't understand why everything went all-bad after that. Shortly after he passed away I had to move from a home I was comfortable at in Union City to Berkeley in a house that my grandfather was in charge of.

A year after that my step-grandmother forced me and my dad to move out there. So, first my grandpa, then moving hella places, and then probation were the three main things that changed my life.

It's been about three years, but since all that's happened I've been messing up in school, getting on one, doing it big, and coming here to the Hall.

-Milkman, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Milkman, doing it big includes staying out of the Hall. If you have a pocket full of money one minute and the next minute it's all gone, you're not rich. We understand that your life has had some obstacles, but it doesn't excuse your situation. If you really want to do it big and be successful, you have to do it another way. Being here, locked up should be a life changing experience. In five years, do you want to continue to tell the story of how your life changed for the worst? You have the opportunity to change your life for the better. All you have to do is, want to. Be smart Milkman, you're stronger than you think.

I'm going to change my life when I get out, I am just tired of coming here, and I wanna change because of my family and for my own self, when I get out, I am just going to start from scratch.

All I Have in Life

My self
My moms
My pops
My family
My money
My pen
My pad
My talent

-Young Tay, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's a trip to compare this to your poem about what you think girls are into – because this poem is about your true wealth... the money isn't even the important part. You're right to end on that line: My talent. Your talent is the most important thing you have – part intellect, part heart, part soul. It may be "all" you have in life, but it's also all you need.

In Your Own Way

I been there when times was so good
that you will do whatever you have to keep it that way.
I been there when times was so bad
that you ask yourself why is this shhh happening to me?
But if you don't know what I am talking about,
it's the game
you know.
Don't play like you don't know
'cause if you in here you playing the game
in your own way.

-Baby Lou, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We turned this hardhitting piece into a poem because it had such a cool poetic ring to the way you set up those opening lines. And yes, if people are locked up, chances are they're being played by the game in their own way. That's right, not playing. Being played, and that means you too – so what are you going to do to stop being played by this heartless game?

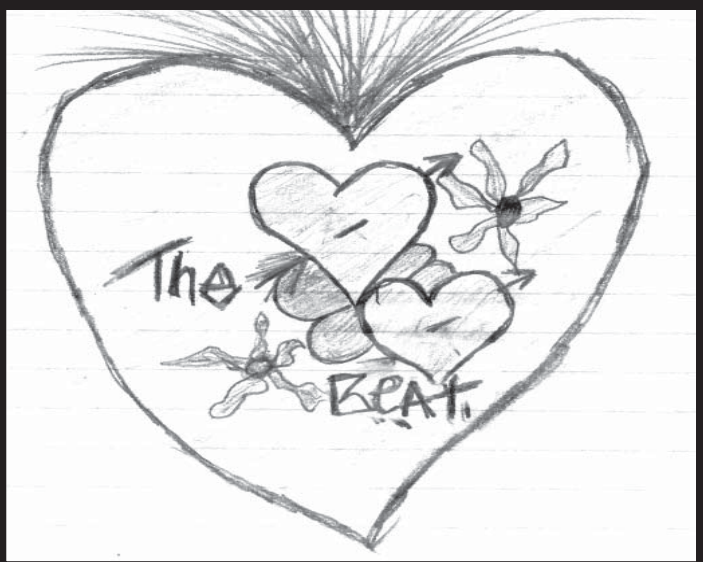
Hidden Pain

Everyone has pain that's hidden, and I'm going to share some of mine. I have a lot of family problems, like my dad being really sick. I found out today that he is on life support, and I did not know that.

Another thing is that my mom is really sick with diabetes, and when she is stressed, it makes things worse. These are some of the hidden pains in my life.

-Julian, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: That's more than enough pain Julian. You can help to make it better on everyone, including yourself, by redirecting your energy toward helping out at home, when you're released. Thanks for sharing this sadness with us. We hope your dad pulls through. Our best wishes to you and your family.



My Opinion

This ya' boy Young Turk here about to put game in y'all heads so listen up.

My topic to y'all is, to let all you young ninjas know that life's a b— and then you die. It's not often young ninja get a chance to enjoy riches in a gentleman fashion. So many of us say screw it. Get a bucket and run in something and keep smashing.

It's all about survival, but it hard for us to do this, so everybody got a gun. But when we was young, our only weapon was our two fists, if you a man and have a heart, be a savage, weather you sober or drunk. I didn't see a ninja in the pen get they ass dug out over some hot water, but that's the game homeboy and every move you make is a gamble.

The squares don't understand, so it take a ninja like me to explain. I show violence and hatred 'cause underneath it, is so much pain. I ain't no sissy or punk so don't trip when you see me crying, a ninja is just hella mad that his potnas is dead and his folks keep on dying. My enemies feel the same way. I live day by day, not given an "ef." When they ask me why, I pause for a minute then I reply cause life's a bitch and then you die.

-Young Turk, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Young Turk, ok we can see that this life has frustrated you, but life doesn't have to be this way. If you have this kind of attitude, then this is the kind of life you will live. You've lost a lot of your homies to this violent lifestyle. Revenge won't bring your patnas back. The only way to stop this pain is to change your attitude. The cycle of revenge benefits no one. It's true that we will all die one day, but how we live our life is up to us. So, we want to know why you choose to live your life this way...? Take more than a minute to think about, and give us an honest answer.

Dear Beat

I have a tattoo and yes it means something. Everybody I know has something similar to it, that's why I love my bra, he say, he keep it solid and I know he is 'cause his tat mean just as much as mine. All my ninjas say the tat's and scars we have will remind us of each other when one of us is dead and gone.

I have a potna that's gone, his name is Rob and every time I look at my tattoo I say RIP and pray to God He let my bra in Heaven's doors and know my bra was a beast when he was here.

I got too much on my mind in here, but I'm gon' hold it down. Why not? But I need to change and I am, cause ninjas took my bra and he wasn't doin nothing to nobody, that's why when I get out I'm going to get my sins washed away. I'm going to get reborn, so I can go to Heaven. I was doing to much and now I realize this life ain't for me. So, I'm going to better myself for the good not the worst and I hope my lil' bra do the same.

Just keep it solid and your head up. He know, but ninjas know what they got to do. So, just maintain in the meantime 'cause ninjas gon' see the outs again. That's why I'm gon' change 'cause we gon' eat on a good tip, so keep yo head up. I'm out, one love

-Bezo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Bezo, you sound like you are going to make a big life change. The process of being reborn starts with you deciding that you want a new life. You are already one step in the right direction. But know that every step will get harder and harder. Rewards come to those who earn it. If you really want this new life for yourself, you must work hard to attain it. You are a smart kid. Keep your mind focused on this positive change.

My Loving Mom

My invisible scar is when my mother died and left a tear in my heart. That's my permanent tattoo.

-Pookie, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Pookie, that is something that you will carry with you for the rest of your life. How can you live your life, in a way that will honor her memory?

Money On My Mind

I stay with money on my mind
Got to have ambition to make it through
This life I live
And rise up
Around gangstas, hustlas, playas, pimps, and macks
I stay with money
On my mind
Ever since I had my first nickles and dimes
I remember mama telling me
Ambition is what you gotta have
To make it through this life
Hit that age were I started getting hungry
Makin' some money
But, my tummy
Was still growlin'
So I started comin' home late
'Cause yo' boy was grindin'
I had no choice but to gangbang
I didn't even do the crime
But still took the blame
That's how is when your livin' in the fast lane...

-Lil' Flaco, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Lil' Flaco we had to cut a few lines off your piece, but we printed most of it because you are a good writer. Why is it so noble to have money on your mind? Obviously money is more important to you than your freedom. What good is your money now? Money will buy you food, clothes, shelter, a good life – but look where has this paper chase brought you? Don't lose sight of what's really important.

If I Could Do One Thing Over

If I could do one thing over, it would be my life. It is hard to change it, but when I get out, I am going to start over. I got a lot of things going on in my life that I want to do over, like getting in trouble. I really don't get in trouble, but I did this time. It is okay. I will be out in no time.

Another thing I want to do over, is school. I think I could do a little better if I could do it over. I wish that over this entire earth, it would be no more killing, and on this earth, people would not be getting jumped. People should just start over with their self. I wish that I could start over. If I can, I will be the best person on the planet. So, in conclusion, people need to stop all the violence, so everything will okay.

-Demetrus, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You don't have to be the best person in the world, but you do need to be part of the solution and not part of the problem. It's fine to wish the world would change, but you need to do more than wish that you would — you need to put in the time, the practice, the effort. Every day look for progress, not perfection. And no matter what, don't give up on doing better.

The Hardest Thing I've Had to Do

The hardest thing I had to do, is see my great grandmother in a casket. She died because she was old. She was ninety-eight years old. She is in heaven now, and that is good.

My grandmother is sickly. So that is why I'm in here, but it is okay. The things I do are not bad things. They are good things. It is hard to be locked up in a place like this. That is hard for me. And another thing that is hard for me, is following direction. That is one of the things that is hard. Another is finding a job. I need a job so I can keep a lil' money to go to college I am going to need a little help doing that, but that is a hard thing to do.

Yet another hard things for me, is controlling my temper. That is a hard thing for me to control, my temper, because when I go off, I do not stop. I take all my anger out on that person. Another thing is to give respect to a person that I don't like. I feel they have got to earn my respect, on the real side, that is the truth.

-Demetrus, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Accepting and viewing death is very hard on our souls. Your great grandmother lived a very long life. Tell us more about her! Now tell us about the good things you do? Why do you suppose it is hard for you to follow direction? Finding a job is hard, absolutely, it's a true test on oneself. Why don't you start with The Beat Within!? Come on down to our office! To work on your anger, is challenging too, at least you recognize the problem and now you can begin to work on that temper of yours, from taking deep breaths, walking away, exercising, whatever helps! And to give respect, shhh, if no one bothers you then you should do the same, and if someone does bug you, what should you do? Tell us! Be smart!

Where I See Myself In Five Years

Where do I see myself in five years? I see myself getting a job to make a little money so I can support myself and pay the bills. And then I will find a pretty girl and have some kids, like two, and then we will move out of this state.

I will move to Denver, Colorado, with my wife and kids so they can be safe. I will own my house, and I will have three cars: a scraper, a van, and a Hummer. Then I would be out of trouble.

And I would buy me a church, so I can go every Sunday. God's in my heart, so I know He's going to watch over me and my family. And then I will know I would be safe. I will go back to school and get my GED, so I can know the things that I did not get to learn. I need to know some more things. So this is my story to The Beat Within, from Demetrus. This is what I am going to do in five years.

-Demetrus, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's a good five-year plan. But remember that you don't have to rush into having children. Get your life straight, get that good job, spend some time with your wife, really getting to know each other — then with a good stable job, marriage, income, etc., then start your family.

Why People Getting Killed In 2006

Why are all these people dying in 2006? That is bad, to turn on the TV, and hear that somebody' brother, sister, daddy, mother, cousin or uncle died this year. That is so sad, to hear people' family getting killed. I hate hearing things like that kind of thing.

So that this will not get to nobody, just know that I, Demetrus, wrote it because that is how I feel. So I'm going to have to let you go. So, goodbye, have a nice day. God bless you, and bless all my family and make sure that they are doing good. Thank you.

-Demetrus, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That is a question we ask often: why are these killings? Too many guns? Too much crazy talking? Too little respect for self-control? Too many young people involved in the dope game? It is very sad indeed.

I Am Going to Change When I Get Out

What am I going to do when I get out? I am going to change, because I don't want to get in no more trouble. If I do get in trouble again, I will do a lot of time. So I am not planning to come back here.

I am going to do good. I am going to church, and then I'm going to get me a job, so I can get a little money when I need it. And then I'm going to find me a girl, so I can come home and stay at home. Then we will have two or three kids, and then we will get married. Then we would soon get a house and then we're done.

-Demetrus, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's a good plan, but remember that you can go home at night even before you have found a girl to share your life — or you won't have any life to share with any girl.

Freeing Myself

Today girl I cried forever
while you enjoy
I promised to dry my eyes when ever
time gets better
for me to walk the long way
no more short cuts there I stay
I leave you wit' just my words until
It's so you could feel
my gentle touch of the wind
if only they knew
I don't blame you to pretend
It's noticeable that I loved you
but I'm freeing myself now I'm through.

-Lil' Mainy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The long way will sometimes make us tired, but our bodies and mind get stronger with each step, and we pass by so many interesting things. We encourage you to "walk the long way" and learn from your journey. Good luck!

Search Of A Soulmate

I'm not searchin
I'm lookin in the wrong places,
tryin'a find my soul-mate wit' mask faces
layers of the heart shield for no reason
believin' the eyes, I look in fear of such lessons
tired of searchin' I give up
I walked through suburbs and slums—I'm fed up
may it be my time someday
of the finder of my soul-mate.

-Lil' Mainy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Hearts can sometimes shield us from unwanted pain, even when we want to open up to the possibilities of the world. It takes work.

We All Lose

Loses, failure, set back
it's only when we stop tryin'
that we defeat ourselves
we will love
like everybody else
even the life we choose
what we hold the closest, fades
simple wishes still has no trades
we could want everything
but it goes away serenely
be the one thinkin' you can get what you want
the simple things are the best one needs
basics... we pass on by
trust me it ain't the best being fly
it ends
people will remember the things you caused in their lives
we come to remember the times
why you think music & books live; it won't die
but we will lose
there is no clues
its just life.

-Lil' Mainy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It is just life—the little things mean a lot. Like memories, which are sometimes all we leave, or all we take with us. Nice piece...

All Of Me

What ever I'm writin
I'm givin you all of me
drawin my big picture under sea
there so y'all could always feel me
tryin of more lettin' my tears be more less
the return of cry..... rest
when the blood start to rain...
The return of cry change
the change of eyes becomes the change of lives
until I reach the sky...
my words will be my cloud
take a walk with me, I'm sharin' it all with you now
just trust me, if I'm empty you'll be full
unless you don't believe in mistakes
the ones we make
that set the mind free of elsewhere
whatever I write I mean
whatever I'm writin I'm givin' you all of me.

-Lil Mainy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: There's a lot of emotion in this piece...we love the cloud and sky images, and the picture under the sea. Lots of powerful stuff.

Full Surface

Full surface beyond my open
let me dream out spoken
we are slaves of everything
the people around give judgment for something
beyond who we are
who stands to remind of a star
we have purpose
meaning of full surface
pragmatic
and so only if
while I sit scholarly
I must be faithfully
towards soulfully
writin they can't hurt this
'cause it comes from full surface.

-Lil' Mainy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We like the positive energy in this piece, and that you don't give in to the judgment of others. Remember to stay grounded and think about the meaning of each word individually as well as what they mean in context, with the words around them. Good work—you have so much to say...

Exposer Me

My cinnamon honey skin
tone body
not bad yet not perfect either
not of my view
explorer of feelings, emotions, breakdown, builder of something
new
stander of a statue of my few heart breaker moments too:
yet I cry through hands that felt and touched
shelter tears just until they dry as much
of my heart of thirst no drink of passion before lust
like some pain needed to be helped my love maker is used
my needer now needs wanting
lickin the lips that were kissin another flesh
eyes hot of tears of night that was more, then less
becoming a gentleman
doin' the best I can
setting myself free
of the exposer me.

-Lil' Mainy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It sounds like you want to change your ways and become a gentleman. Your writing is really beautiful and figurative, sometimes it's just a little vague. Tell the reader what it is you're talking about—be more specific and you will carry us with you. We can see you have so many valuable things to say and want everyone to benefit from your work, not just those of us who understand what you're saying.

They Ain't Takin' You Away

They ain't takin' you away
we lived seventeen years, five months and seventeen days
I need you to stay
death I cheated on
could she hurt me down and take my thrown
they ain't takin you away
yo' two sisters and momma need you okay
I know dudes hate on you 'cause yo' leadership wants the RIGHT way
be only you...
don't listen boy, damn what they say
hachoo... God been blessed you
you a warrior, someone's student, remember the wise
people know its true
they ain't takin' you away
November twelve yo' birthday soon will be eighteen
you been changed now let the best pay
off where my fate promised to make dreams
only become real
you ain't made to kill humans
you made to heal
set movements
they ain't takin' you away
because I'm this person the dudes hate
because I'm this person I need to stay
they ain't takin' you away.

-Li'l Mainy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: 18 is coming soon...leading the right way will take you to better places, no matter who hates you for it. You'll soon find friends who will truly love you for your knowledge and positiveness. Good luck.

There For

These words I care for
return of my journey
walk of my soul
still of my body
stop of my life
strength of my growth
open hands drown of its wetness
mind with dream
heart stutters in front of life
afraid of something not seen
bold in front of pain
afraid of sun's brightness
happy and joyful while maybe eyes on the sky's rain
let me understand itself
understand who I am
walk with someone else
in rupture the
sound of dry leaves
alone with capture
takin' short steps in the breeze
may the day scud into night
shadows of the beauty so life
death of the precious
dust from untouched
shine and moist of the love, trust and lust.

-Lil' Mainy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The images of your walk with "someone else" are really strong...the leaves and the breeze are concrete images that ground us in your poem. Well done.

Different

I'm me there's no comparison
I'm not for competition
I'm different and people who are the same hate difference of premise
soon... better at now, who I am is present
a life I live of stanza
in being my realist
around me they're rapacious ha!
In my dreams I refuge
I'm afraid of no man but my life re-abuse
I'm different and what remains the same hates difference
in my dreams I sleep strongly in my life awake I have feebleness
but eye reach the firmament
till remainin' of everything the same will always be different.

-Lil' Mainy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Definitely, what depends on the existing system resists change, and is often threatened by it (referring to "what remains the same hates difference). Tell us what it is that remains the same—what is it that hates your changes?

Visible

These walls that are around me
These walls that surround me
These walls that encase me
You think they can hold me
But they can't
'Cause I'm free within

Far beyond the sea
My soul can fly
Higher than any plain
My soul flies on angels' wings
Free, though locked within

The place where no one can see me
Is the place just me, myself, and I
I can be whatever I wanna be
Where I'm not free

The place where I feel loved and embraced
Within the arms of the one who loves me
The one who loves me for what I am
Not for what others think I should be

For the walls they've built
Thick and high
No one controls me
No one can hold me nor my mind
'Cause my thoughts fly within

So I'll sit here for a minute
Where I can be seen by those
Who can't see me
Excited to seem
To be
And not be seen

-Lil' Lazy LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Amazing poem. It takes someone very spiritual or imaginative to be able to transcend the walls that incarcerate you. But we wonder what the last stanza means—how can you be seen by someone who can't see you? Can you please explain?

Hundred Acre 'Hood

Just like Pooh wants his honey
I want my fast money
Just like Pooh likes his honey
I like my Playboy bunnies
Just like Pooh will do anything for his honey
I'll do anything for my homies
Just like Pooh jump and fight
Against the bees for his honey
I'll jump in the beef and fight
For my homies
Not like Pooh, just like me
I'll stay in the beef, on my feet

-Lil' Lazy LCRS, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We cut the last two lines of your very wonderful poem, because we felt it was a bit too glorifying. Sadly, you are too loyal to your homies, look where you sit today. What's next on your plate?

Days And Nights

Days and nights
Don't know what to do
I can't sleep, eat, or think
Just da thought of you bein' in my mind
Makes me wanna cry
Goin' back to dem days
When you used to sit by my side
Tellin' me that you love me
Now that I look at it
You was takin' me for a fool
I can't understand how love can be so blind
Now I know that
Love is pain
Tellin' me things that weren't true
Makin' sure that things I heard weren't real
Talkin' 'bout
"Girl, you know it's that he said she said"
I was dumb enough to believe you
An' for believin' what you said
I'm over here all heartbroken
For believin' w'at you said
Always and forever

-Brownie and Grumpy

From The Beat: Well, the story of broken hearts and shady boys who make false promises to girls is an old one — and a sad one. We don't like to see you broken-hearted, but at the same time, we wish you'd focus some of that emotion on what brings you here so that you won't have to write about love, you can experience it freely. Sad words are no substitute for the real thing.

Losing My Mind

(Dedicated to us)
I wake up every morning in this managed hell
Living my life in this crazy cell
A country room is what I called my home
Thinking about those firme memories every day
Every time I get a phone call my jefa hangs up
I might be thinking like, damn that sucks
I get pictures of my friends
Man, they grow so fast
Have to keep my head up
Can't lose my mind

Chorus:
Losing my mind, mind
I'm in my cell block just doing hard times, times
Losing my mind,
I'm all stood up
Pink up on the main line
Losing my mind

I'm going crazy and loca every day and every night
Losing y mind
They putting more charges against me and that shhh ain't right right
Losing my mind
Poetry ain't gonna waste my time
Got to keep my head up
Can't lose my mind
Always,

-La' Dreamer

From The Beat: Keeping your sanity in an unnatural environment like Hillcrest can be a real challenge. What do you do to make sure you don't lose your mind? Do you read? (We know you write!) Do you make plans for the freedom that is coming to you? We hope so because the old saying, "A failure to plan is a plan to fail" is too true.

Those Times

We both sit back, relax in this four wall room
With no access to our communication
Reminiscing of those firme tiempos we spent together
Looking back on the time we were about to die
Right next to each other
Holding back some times we can't bring back
Locked up here makes us think forward on our life
Can't understand why this happened to us
Why we can't talk to each other the same way we used to do
But Tiny, guess what?
I don't care about no PO
I'm still here – well, actually both of us
And now all we do is look at each other and laugh
Of the times we spent with your man Chapin
Love a first sight and my ex –vato Lil' Shadow
It's hard to forget about those firme vatos
Now pay back is here
We are the ones suffering in these messed up cells
Always,
La' Tiny y Lil' Chapin
La Dreamer y Lil' Shadow

-La Tiny y La Dreamer

From The Beat: The two of you collaborate well in poetry that reminisces about love and old times. Our only suggestion is that you put as much energy and attention on looking forward as on looking back. Thinking about and planning for your future is the necessary first step to creating a different future than your past. It's time.

Things I Miss

I really miss my family, my sisters. Especially I wish that I never did what I did. But I did. So I want to go home and lie in my own bed, wear my own clothes, do what my mom tells me to do.

I miss going to school. I want to graduate on stage on June 15, 2006. I want to get out and do the right thing with my life. I don't want to end up back, locked up. I can't wait to go home. I miss all my family very much and I miss my honey bun very much and love everyone.

-Nique

From The Beat: We want you to cut this fine little piece out and tape it to your bedroom or bathroom mirror so that you can read it and remind yourself of what you suffered when you were taken from your family. That way, you won't be tempted to repeat the mistakes of the past.

Dear Life

When's all this gonna stop?
Hate, pain, sorrow — when's it gonna be dropped?

It's like I'm stuck in this cycle of hate, pain and sorrow. First I get released then I do something stupid. Then my parents get sad and feel so much pain. I hate it. I miss my mom. I miss my dad. I miss my sisters. I miss my niece. And I miss my boyfriend. It seems like there's nothing out there and all I want is freedom.

-Kit-Cat

From The Beat: If there's nothing out there, what do you want to do with your freedom? No, there is much out there. In fact, there is too much out there, and that is the problem — some of the freedom to choose has led to bad decisions which has led here. If you know this cycle of misbehavior leading to arrest leading to freedom leading to more misbehavior, then what is keeping you from stopping those things that take you away from everything you love? Which do you love more, the illegal things you do that give the system power to take you from your parents, your sisters, your niece and your boyfriend, or the people themselves? The true test of love is how much you're willing to sacrifice.

That Last Argument

Wwwhhaaa! Hillcrest!
DDDEEYYAAAMM. that juvie facility.
One day I was at my house watching TV.
Put it on BET and everything was coo'.
Then my mom came out of nowhere and yelled at me hella rude.
She said, "Get your ass up and do something useful"
And I was like blah, blah, blah, blah, whatever — which means
"Forget you!. I do what I want to do!"
Wwwhhaaa! Hillcrest!
DDDEEYYAAAMM that Juvii facility.
That last argument was very cruel and I laid a finger on her a couple of times.
Yeah, I know I'm a fool. Ha, Ha, Ha. Now tha police comes through
Wwwhhaaa! Hillcrest!
DDDEEEYYYAAMMM that Juvie facility.
I'm sitting here in my room, thinkin' what tha hell did I just do?
Now I got court on tha first and I don't know what's gonna happen.
But my mom comes through to pay me a visit. We are now coo'.

-Hands On My Mom

From The Beat: You can damn this juvenile facility all you want, but that won't keep you out of here. We hope you take what you did seriously. You only have one mother, and she will be part of you and you will be part of her forever. What do you think the consequences of your action should have been? What are you going to do different when you go home?

RIP

It's been over ten-and-a-half-months. But in a lifetime of memories the day I heard you were gone I broke down crying on my knees saying, "Oh Lord, please take me instead, because I feel like I'm already dead." I reminisce this about back in the days, Lil' Guero, when we just kicked it in the barrio with all the homies. It was cool, just watching the jura pass by as we threw up our gang signs. But no, nothing is going to happen 'cause I know you're right by my side.

I remember the first day I met you, homie. We were kickin' it with all the homies and jainas. You were only 16 years old but you looked older. You were proving to everybody that you were down. You always had my respect. Thank you for watching my back and always staying right by my side.

I miss the stories you used to tell me about your life and the jainas and about when you were torcido. I'll always remember you so don't trip. Whenever you were around you got my respect and the homies, too, for the whole neighborhood. You were true, flashing your tats like it was a thing to do. Walking through the barrio all alone you didn't care. You always had it, never needed anyone to help you out. But you helped me out and that's without a doubt.

I love you, dog. eramos dos mocosos (we were two snot-nosed kids) just doing our thing, always cruising in RWC or in MV with the jainas, living our crazy life. Now time knows when I got to go. But I wish we could kick it in the barrio just one more time. Every time I get stressed give me a lil' sign so I won't get depressed. I got a jaina, just to let you know, and not one of dose lil' silly jainas. Even though homies go their separate ways I hope you stay by my side till my dying day.

Rest in peace. I'm sorry homie, every night I think about that day and I get a lil' teary. Si supieras lo que Isiste Dejastes a tus padres bien tristes no es un chiste es algo enserio caiste al sementerio de los 16 anos nomas por un pano y el barrio que queries tanto. (If you knew what you did, you left your parents very sad. It is not a joke. It is something very serious. You landed in the cemetery at the age of 16 all because of a rag and the 'hood that you love so much.)

Every time you cross my mind tu sabes que me aguito (you know that I get sad). Chale homie I hella miss you. Can someone tell me why my homie had to die? Can someone tell me why I never said goodbye. Someone took you out with a cuete because they were too scared to fight with hands. Homies out there disfruten a sus homies (enjoy being together) before they go. My couple of days with Lil' Guero were tight. I could still hear him say to this day, "Ey, Lil' Stranger, come on out so we could kick it." Homie I'll see you later. I love you. Alrato.

-Lil' Stranger

From The Beat: There is not much we can add to this sad good-bye to a homie. All we can say is that it doesn't have to be this way. It's not part of "the Plan" to bury your friends when you're still a teenager yourself. You can keep Lil' Guero alive in your heart and soul as long as you keep yourself alive in body.

Message to My People

Who I can call my people is my race. What I would say to black people is never take any racism things to the heart because most of the time the people mouth that it comes out of is either jealous or want to be your race. You do have the right to say something if you're being called out of your race or being called a foul name that means a bad thing in your past of racism.

To all of my people don't let anyone bring you down on your race. You should always know that you're black and always be proud. And to all my people I just have to say even if other races go around acting our race and saying things they shouldn't say, just always remember that all the things come from our race and they just wanna follow our lead. They like how we do 'cause you know we do it well and we got it like that.

Some of my people is from the San Francisco and you know San Francisco. I'm from San Francisco where we hyphy and go dumb. But besides that when I hear the saying "my people" what I think of is my race. For all my people be glad of who you are and stay black and stay proud.

-Lil' Mama

From The Beat: We admire the message at the heart of this piece: be proud of who you are. But at the same time, we have to add that our experience tells us that racism is not confined to one group or another, but is something to be on guard against in every group. Racism, whether it's white people calling out black people or black people calling out Asian people, etc., it's almost always based on ignorance. And the cure for ignorance is education — just as education is the cure for so many of the problems in society.

Money No More

If money were no longer a worry
I'd be able to relax and live without hurry
Time used to tick at such a fast pace
It would be nice to enjoy the wind on my face
I would travel the world and give all I can
Show the world I'm not the same man
I want to see everyone getting along
No more war, violence, or people doing wrong
Life is too short to let it slip by
Today you're alive the next you could die
With that in mind I spread my word
Making sure everyone heard
That it doesn't matter what you have or how much
Just live each day to its fullest touch
Life is precious and you only have one
Live it right or you could be done

-Dylan

From The Beat: Boy, Dylan, we wish everyone looked at the world the way you do. We're sure sorry the luxury of not worry about money, because we know the pleasure of feeling the wind on your face. Where would you travel? What causes would you give to? Of course, you can accomplish much of you want even with money worries, as long as they don't become some consuming that they lead you to places like this.

Not Worth It

Here I am in Hillcrest Juvenile Hall for assaulting somebody. I only did it because the person was talking some shhh to me and in the time I've been here I learned it wasn't really worth it. Even though that person probably won't talk shhh to me next time he sees me, it wasn't really worth it.

Because of these things that I have now realized rather than just ignoring the experience like I was going to do, I'm going to learn from it so the outcome of situations like this will be different. Now if something like that were to happen, I would just ignore whatever the person is saying and think about what would happen to me. I would remember that I would have to come back to Hillcrest and be miserable and probably spend even more time here than I did before.

And after all that goes through my mind, I would just walk off. That would be the end of it and I wouldn't be back in here.

-No Name

From The Beat: Whoever you are, this shows great maturity. We hope that you truly have learned what you say you've learned, because the momentary pleasure you might have felt for going off on someone talking "shhh" about you is more than offset by the long-term pain you're feeling by having to live with the consequences. The old saying, "Sticks and stones can break my bones but names will never hurt me," isn't exactly true, because names often do hurt us. But returning that hurt with violence only compounds the problem, and ultimately makes you hurt even more. We know that if you can control yourself in here (because you know the consequences of losing control), then you can also control yourself out there.

Deep Feeling

I always carry these deep feelings that I can't even explain or talk about. I wake up thinking where my jefita is, thinking how much she's been on her knees crying for her baby daughter. And I can't forget how much pain she's suffered. Just have a deep feeling I can't forget. All the things I put her through and all the times I made her look for me. Now I just have a big feeling that don't let me go or let me sleep.

-Tiny

From The Beat: You are suffering from guilt, a condition that you can overcome by changing the things you feel guilty about. You're right, you've put your mother through a lot, but all mothers go through a lot for their children. But there comes a time when the child grows, matures into a responsible person who understands the debt she or he owes a parent. We believe that in your maturity, you will find a way to give back some of what she has given you — and the best gift of all would be to stop doing the things that let strangers take you away from her.

Dear Brother

Many years have passed us by
Pain and suffering and all the cries
Passed around like a pair of shoes
Don't really care because there's nothing to lose
Living life like it's a dream
Waking up to the same old things
Mother and father can care less
They're happy with their new family
Because we are terrorists
Now that you're going to CYA
I can't bear the fact you're going away
I know it's not a place for you
But it's gonna be okay
We're both gonna get through
I love you bro with all my heart
Keep your head up...
Because it's just the start
Love,

-Dbo

From The Beat: The love and special bond you have with your brother shine through every word of this sad piece. We are sorry that your brother is on his way to the Y, just as we are sorry to see you in this place. But having each other should give you both the strength and support you need to succeed when you both are again free to be who you are. Stay strong because you can be of no help to him without first being a help to yourself.

Dear Life

Coming at me so fast
Time's a ticking
Pretty soon I'll be the past
Watching my life unfold in front of me
I try to be all I can be
Living each day like it might not be there tomorrow
Staying clear of all the pain and sorrow
Throwing situations at me like a curveball
I can't help but overcome them all
Not going to let you slip by
With knowing that I didn't try
I hope I will have you for many years
Triumphing over obstacles with blood, sweat and tears
Life is a package with many twists
Some make me happy, others create a fist
Life's so short in the big scheme
Sometimes I think it's all a big dream
Seeing the importance of life is so easy
I love life and it loves me

-Dylan

From The Beat: We love that you love life, and that you're determined to overcome the obstacles she throws in your path. The interesting thing about it is that life does throw challenges at us, but it also provides us with the tools to meet those challenges. It does go by very fast, though, so what plans do you have to make the changes necessary to let you live yours in freedom and health?

The Life Of A Souljah

The county I live in is so raw
And now I'm lookin' at these white walls
Eatin' garbage, wearin' otha fools' drawe's
This is no game so listen
I'm trapped in the system 'cause I'm not about snitchin'
I lost all the freedom that I had
Now I got to deal wit' it like a sav
Mom's duce why
When you have beside you is a loving mom and dad
It's just me, born and raised in the streets
I got knocks that eat my yellow rocks like pac man
I say I wanna change but it's so hard
Do what I do now I'm behind steel bars
I can't be mad 'cause that's the life I chose
I slang 'cause I like to be geared with jayz and
multicolored bows

-Young Detainee

From The Beat: Yes, you like to be "geared with jayz and multicolored bows," but are you? That's the paradox of your position. You correctly remind us how hard it is to change, but you recognize from the very beginning how hard it is to do what you're doing ("eatin' garbage, wearin' otha fool's drawe's..."). So, your choices are between hard and hard. But one of those hard choices leads to a hard future where more steel bars are almost

Tomorrow Is Another Day

Tomorrow is another day
For us to mend our sorrows
And forget our troubles

I see that you're never there
But you do spare and share
The good times of mine
While I ask myself why

Tomorrow is another day
For us to mend our sorrows
And forget our troubles

As you approach me I coach myself
To hide to justify the fact
That you're my role model

-Blackberry

From The Beat: Without knowing who these painful yet hopeful words are addressed to, it's hard for us to know what awaits you. This sounds like a very complicated relationship, but one which deserves

Been Down For A Minute

Yeah, I've been down for a minute. All over little things, like not going to school and smoking. I got locked up for a violation and was sent to camp. I did eight months. Then 20 days later I violated and got another three months, so here I am. I only got 20 days left, then I'm going to be given another chance. This time I really want to stay out so I'm going to have to make some changes.

-Justin

From The Beat: We've said it before, Justin, but getting out is the easy part. As you've learned, it's staying out that's hard. You know which violations to avoid, but you knew that before, too. So it's not knowledge you lack. Just wanting to stay out is not

Keep Ya Head Up!

What's up Mami, what it do?
I got somethin' to say to you!
I know you goin' through it,
But don't give up and say "screw it"
Smile, it ain't that bad
You don't always gotta be sad
Don't worry baby, I got you
And I promise I'ma stay true
Just open up ya heart
And nothin' will tear us apart
You my Bonnie, I'm your Clyde
So together we gon ride!
Bes' believe I'ma hold you down
Wit' me you're safe and sound
On the real girl I'm feelin' you
And I know that chola's still in you
I still got thug in me too
I'm tryna get to know the other side of you
So baby girl don't give up
Mami keep ya head up!

-Young Royal

From The Beat: You've heard us before on the subject of Bonnie and Clyde. Who knows what they might have achieved if

I'm Out

I'm leaving on Mother's Day, which is also my birthday. When I get out I'm going to hug my mom. I miss my family and being here has helped me realize how much better it is out there. I wanna be good. Amen.

-Regular Joe

From The Beat: We hope you make the right decisions when you are free to make your own decisions. Hugging your mother is a good beginning — and never forgetting that it's better out there is another.

My Mama

My mom means the world to me.
She is everything a girl would want for a mom.
She's there no matter what happens.
My mom is my everything.
She's very sweet and nice,
everything you could expect for a mom.
If I'm feeling down and sad
the only person that I look after is my mom.
She's my angel, my knight in armor.
Losing my mom would hurt me so bad
I would go crazy without my angel. So for all those that don't show their moms love, you should do it. You just got to be there for each other no mater what happens.

-La Grumpy

From The Beat: This is a beautiful tribute to your mama, La Grumpy, but beyond beautiful words, how do you show your mom you love her? What do you think she wants from you more than anything else? Can you find a way to stay with her and live your life without risking being taken from her? That would be a gift that just keeps on giving.

My Momma

My momma is the inspiration of this soulja. She lived a lousy life which made us po' on da streets but now she surviving and I'm an animal who took a role of a soulja. She's my inspiration to survive and never be with shhh. Keep it simple. She's the muscle in my brain to keep it working.

-Saint Lewy

From The Beat: Is she your inspiration for being here, Lewy? Have you thought of taking a slower but surer route out of poverty, like getting an education that prepares you for a good job or career? The risks you're taking to take the role of a soulja are huge, and you're experiencing

Fo' Real, Fo' Real

That shhh shady how these ladies lazy
Come to you like pay me
'Cause she claim she got yo' baby
When she was wit' Davy on a daily
Parlayin' wit' her boo Daisy
Guzzlin' 5ths of Hyp and Hen
Wit' her best friend Stacy
Start trippin' over false statements
Pass her up in the wip
get slashed tires for not waving

-DA

From The Beat: If she could come to you and even claim you were the father of her baby, then neither of you was acting responsibly. Do you really think you got your tires

Love

Love is so hard to explain nowadays
Love is like a game that no one could explain
Love can stab you in the back
'Cause that's what it did to me
Love betrayed me, not only love
But the guy I was with
He played me like you play on a board game
He used me like he wears his clothes
The way he wants it
He betrayed me like you never seen
Before and most of all
He cheated on me with the girl
I saw in juvenile hall
He thought that I would never find out
But he was wrong
I found out when I got locked up
I feel like I'm not in love with him anymore
So why do I feel hurt at what he did to me
I guess I'm confused
But I have to keep my head up
And wait till the next lover bird

-No Name

From The Beat: It's not just nowadays that makes love so hard to explain; it's always been hard to explain love! We're sorry you've had to experience what most everyone has to experience some time in their life, but at least it's taught you the valuable lesson that what men say is not always what they feel. You were with a little boy who didn't know how to be honest. As you mature, you will find mature young men who do know what it means to be responsible, and you will find

A Message To My People

If I was to give a "positive" message to my peoples I would tell them that the game ain't the place ta be. I mean come on now, fo' real fo' real, y'all wanna be up in here till you 18, then end up in county? I'm gonna assume not! And I hate to break it to you, but it's either that, the gutta, or death...So choose your poison. So the best advice I can give, even though I'm not a role-model, is to try your hardest to do things the legit way and cause the least amount of pain possible for yourself.

On the other hand, if I was to give a message to my peoples that they could really relate to, it would be to do what you gotta do to stay up. Life on the streets is hard if you're not lookin' out for your best interest (every man for themselves) 'cause things can get messy...yaddadimean?

So if you one of the cats in the struggle, I suggest you get out or stay up 'cause it's not easy to keep your head above the waves sometimes! You gotta do things the illegal way most of the time and that causes pain so be prepared!

Much love and respect.

-Ashley

From The Beat: The problem we have with your analysis that life on the streets is hard if you're not looking out for your best interests is how do you know what is in your best interests until afterwards? We think the best advice you give is to do things "the legit way and cause the least amount of pain..." If

So the best advice I can give, even though I'm not a role-model, is to try your hardest to do things the legit way and cause the least amount of pain possible for yourself.

Dear Mama

I know we've had our ups and downs. But regardless of everything, you're still my mom and I love you very much. I'm sorry for all the bad things I've said in the past. I only said it out of anger. I didn't mean none of it. I hope you forgive me if I ever hurt you.

Tomorrow is my release which means it's a new beginning for me now that I'm 18. But it also means a fresh start for me and you. I've realized that you're the one who love me and who's been there from the beginning. You are my mother and my father. Yes, you made mistakes. But it's okay because no one is perfect. I know I'm not.

Well Mom, with that said, I love you always and forever. Happy Mother's Day.

-Chilindrina

From The Beat: This is a very nice Mother's Day message. Now that you're 18, we hope you take seriously just what "a new beginning" means for you. Don't do things

My Message

My message to all the people locked up
Do your time and then get out
Have your freedom
Have fun, run and shout
Do what you can
As a free man
Try not to make the mistakes again

-Smokey J

From The Beat: Simple, but excellent advice.

I can't begin to express my thanks and gratitude
She took me as a blessing with a good attitude
She strives to give me the best
Makes sure my life will be better than the rest

My Momma

This rhyme
Goes out to my momma
This time
I'm sorry for all the drama
Crime after crime
Problem after problem
Now it's time for karma
I hit rock bottom
And so they say
What goes around comes around
That's when I hit the ground
I prayed and my family I found
Now it's time to make them proud

-John

From The Beat: Wow, John. We don't know what "rock bottom" was for you, but if it brought you to a point in your life where you realize it's time to make a few sacrifices for a family that has already made many for you, then you've learned something very valuable very early.

My Momma

To me my mom is everything
Brought me into this world like it was nothing
Has raised me right
Cared for me for endless days and nights
I can't begin to express my thanks and gratitude
She took me as a blessing with a good attitude
She strives to give me the best
Makes sure my life will be better than the rest
I hate how my actions cause pain
Wish it would wash away with the spring rain
After all that I've done her support stays strong
Through these difficult times, no matter how long
No matter what I do or what I say
She's there for me every day
My love for her will always be
Lasting forever long after you and me

-Dylan

From The Beat: This is a beautiful poem of thanksgiving to your mom, Dylan, but as you so honestly observe, you can only wish you could wash away the pain you've caused in the past. You can't actually undo any of it. But by recognizing what you owe your mother for all she has done and sacrificed for you, you commit yourself to a different future. The true test of your love will be in how you act, and what you do.

Lost

Is this real?
Is this how I'm supposed to feel?
Help me. I'm scared
This is way too much to bear
I'm lost within myself
Am I really here
Or is this something else?
Is this a place where I can be safe?
It feels like my life is one big relay race
I can't stand to live like this
It feels like I was born to be
On the devil's wish list
It feels like I'm in a dream inside of a dream
And don't say you understand
'Cause you don't even know what I mean
I'm struggling to get out
But no one can hear me
No matter how loud I shout
Please help me reach the light
I won't be able to survive
Without putting up a fight
What is it that I'm stuck inside
I can't get away and I don't know why
Am I stuck in my own mind
or is it the stuff
I'm covering up and trying to hide
Is it the memories of my past
Someone please help
I don't think I can last
Am I dead or alive
I feel myself slipping away
I know I can't survive
Is it real?
Or my imagination
I can't stand it anymore
I'm full of anger and frustration
Don't leave me
Come back
I'm trying to be normal
I'm trying so hard
Just to relax
I feel like I'm no longer in control
I'm lost within myself
I have no more feeling
I'm just another lost soul

-Corrine

From The Beat: There is much too much anguish and pain for us to deal with in this piece, Corrine. We strongly encourage you to find some kind of adult psychologist, therapist or even a counselor you trust to talk out the events and traumas in your life that have left you so full of anger and self-recrimination. The thought that you may be existing in a dream reminds us of the poet Edgar Allen Poe who wrote, "Is all that we see or seem but a dream within a dream?" It occurs to us that in addition to the specific sources of your pain, you are also living through a painful part of life for most of us, our adolescence, so we also urge you to remember that the way you feel today is not the way you will feel tomorrow. Time has a way of changing things.

My Momma

My momma is everything. She gave me breath. She gave me air. Without my jefita I will be less than a dime. I love my jefita. I just can't explain all this love I feel for her. My momma just wants me to do right. She is the one that listens to me whenever I'm hurt. She my jefita, my best friend, my everything. The one that has suffered so much tears for me. Now I'm paying half of the half consequences.

-Tiny

From The Beat: Why do you think your momma wants you to do right? Is it just for you, or is it also for her? How can she keep you with her if you do things that let the system take you away from her? Sometimes, love requires sacrifice. What are you willing to sacrifice so that your mother no longer has to sacrifice

Mi Jefita

Estoy atrapada en este humilde cuarto todos los días. Todos los días me pongo a pensar en mi jefita. Como la extraño día y noche, siempre me la paso pensando en los momentos que me hizo reir. Ahora lloro y le pido a Dios que me de fuerzas para decirle que la quiero con todo mi corazón y que me estoy portando bien todos los días aqui y afuera.

Ahora le pido mucho a mi jefita que me perdone por todas las noches que la hice llorar y todas las veces que la hice preocuparse. Ojalá me pueda perdonar. Le pido con todo mi corazón a Dios que nos de fuerzas para amar a nuestras jefitas querida. Quieranla mucho porque una mama nomas vive una vez.

From The Beat: Esperamos que tu fe en Dios llegue a su corazón y vea por ti, y te ayude a cambiar tu forma de ser. Podemos observar que tu madre ha sufrido mucho por las cosas que le has hecho pasar. Tienes que cambiarle esa tristeza en alegría y la única forma como hacerlo sería fuera de este lugar. ¿Crees que puedas hacerlo?

My Mother

I'm trapped in this humbling room everyday. Everyday I start to think about my mother. Oh how I miss her day and night. I always start to think about the moments when she made me laugh. Now I cry and ask God to give me the strength to tell her that I love her with all my heart and that I am behaving myself everyday in here and on the outs.

Now I ask my mother a lot to forgive me for all the nights that I made her cry and all the times that I made her worry. Hopefully she'll be able to forgive me. I beg with all my heart to God to give us the strength so we can love our dear mothers. Love your mothers a lot because a mother only lives one time.

-Roxana

From The Beat: We hope that your faith in God reaches His heart and He looks after you and He helps you change the way you are. We can tell that your mother has suffered a lot because of the things that you have made her go through. You have to change that sadness into happiness and the only way you can make

I'm covering up and trying to hide
Is it the memories of my past
Someone
please help
I don't think
I can last

Wake Up!

When I sit I reminisce
and start to trip on how it is
all the things that I been doin'
and the childhood I missed
don't got nowhere to go when I get out
except the street
got "evicted" for some trick shhh
slangin' D so I could eat
but I ain't trippin'
I just wish that all these youngstas I see
Get their ass up off the street
So that they don't
End up like me

-Grumpy

From The Beat: You know, Grumpy, your advice is completely appropriate for someone of any age and at any stage of their life, which itself is a journey. You have not "ended up" like anything, because you are alive and vibrant and capable of things we don't think you've even considered. Of course, you have been burdened with certain childhood circumstances beyond your control, complicated by burdens you have placed on yourself. But many people have faced bigger obstacles and overcome them. You can too. It must be scary not knowing where you're going to go when you leave here, but not knowing is different from not having anywhere to go. You will find your place. Our fear is in what you will be looking for when you look for your place. We hope it includes school, some support (working for The Beat, for example, a few hours a week), and preparation for a career and a family

I said life for me without the care of money would just be laid back because honestly if I don't have to worry about money I have nothing else to worry about.

A Promise You Couldn't Keep

I'm stuck and I don't know what to do
My heart, my soul, my whole life is with you
I'm scared to know what's gonna happen next
I don't want to see you leave
Like last time when you came dirty on that test
You were gone just like that
I was so scared you weren't coming back
But then when you came home
You made me a promise
You promised me that would neva happen again
And you were so sorry for all the tears you made
And all the smiles that should have been
We worked so hard together
To keep you from doing those things
Now I don't understand why
Your cousin told me what happened
You was doing bad again
You were doing your dirt
And got caught up
Now you're locked up
And you're going to camp
Well you need to know
In my eyes you were my champ
In my eyes you were a star
You was the best
Why would you do this to yourself
After all this time you worked so hard
How could you do this to me, to us
We've come this far
What you promised me was simple
I just wanted you to keep yo' life together
So we could stay together happily
But you already knew that if you left
I would still stick wit' you
But you still made me that promise
And I believed you
Because what we had was deep
Just answer this
Why did you make a promise
you knew you couldn't keep

-Snow Bunny

From The Beat: Whether you are writing this very sad poem to your boyfriend or your mother, it's clearly someone you love very much, and who you feel very let down by. We know that people make their own choices, and that it can be very painful when they choose drugs or other behavior over their love for you (allowing themselves to be taken away from you). But we also know that drug addiction is more than just personal choice; it is also a condition, a disease that must be fought against all the time. So if drugs are at the heart of this disappointment, then fight for sobriety again. The only real failure is not to try again.

Caught In The Middle

I'm caught in the middle between two vatos that I love but can't choose one over the other. One is so sweet, he knows how to treat a lady. He treats me like a princess. He gives me everything I want and need. He's real romantic and playful too. When we kick it I don't want it to end, but then it's time for him to go to work and the next one is there.

With the other vato it's so different but I love him the same. He's like my teddy bear. He hugs me when I'm down and makes me laugh when I'm crying. He listens to me when I need somebody there. My fantasies come true with him. Now I'm caught in the middle between two vatos and I love them both, pero no se que voy hacer. (I don't know what is going too happen.) It will be too hard to choose one because one is at my grip and the other is at my jaw. So for now I guess I got two firme vatos by my side.

-Morenita

From The Beat: Does either of these vatos know about the other one? If not, it seems to us you're setting yourself up for a major fall — which could include losing both of them! We're not saying that you have to choose between them, but only that you should be honest with them and yourself.

Worries

If I didn't have to worry about money I wouldn't be worrying about anything else. I would just live my life pretty much without care and just chill out with my friends. I wouldn't take complete advantage of the situation and just go shopping all the time and waste my money for no apparent reason however. And I wouldn't give it away or start doing volunteer work.

Just because I don't have to worry about money doesn't mean I don't still want it. I would probably save it and eventually donate some amount of it to a charity that supports getting rid of AIDS in Africa but not until I was older. I would only do this because at some time in my life I'm going to come to a point where I don't really need money as much as I did before. So I might as well donate it to something I care about or affects the world and me and not jut so that I could possibly get recognition for it.

But like I said life for me without the care of money would just be laid back because honestly if I don't have to worry about money I have nothing else to worry about.

-Lee

From The Beat: This is interesting, Lee. So, if you had nothing to worry about (your family's health? your job?), what would you do every day? You told us what you would not do with your money when you're young, but not what you would do. We're also interested in your "charity" with your excess money when you get older. What do you know about AIDS in Africa? Why do you feel a need to donate some of your "wealth" to ending that problem? Are there other situations in the world you'd like to improve?

Stuck Between The Two, But Who?

I'm in the middle of love and happiness but what can a chick do when she's stuck between two?
Who knows what to do?
Would he hurt me or him or both that sin.
I don't know where to go.
Please help me, this ain't healthy.
I love my man, but I want this other dude.
He treats me so good, the way a man should.
I love my man but he's so insecure and acts immature.
Should I stay or should I go? My life is so low.
My man is such a gangsta who walks around wit' a big chop.
Should he be the one that gets dropped?
I just don't know but I'm still stuck between the two. What should I do?

-Tatiana

From The Beat: You knew before you wrote this that we couldn't pick for you. This is a dilemma that many people have faced too many times to count. All we can say is that if you are playing with someone who walks around armed, then when he finds that trouble he's looking for, you may end up in the middle. Maybe you should drop both of them and start afresh!

La Vida Loca

La vida loca es hacer drogas. Todo lo que pasa en el mundo es muy raro. Cuando pienso en los problemas que pasan en mi casa, me voy a donde mis amigos para ir por más de los que nos gusta. Este estilo lleva al estilo de vida de un homeless.

From The Beat: Busca la manera en como vivir una vida que no sea la misma vida que estas viviendo porque te vas arrepentir lo que hiciste con tu vida si no paras de hacer estas cosas. Las drogas no son buenas. ¿No has preguntado o visto lo que las drogas han hecho a la comunidad?

The Crazy Life

The crazy life is to do drugs. Everything that happens in this world is very rare. When I think about the problems that go on in my house, I go to where my friends are at for more of what we like. This lifestyle carries the style of life of a homeless.

-Tito

From The Beat: Find a way in how to live a life that is not the same life that you are living right now because you're going to regret what you've been doing with your life if you don't stop doing these things. Drugs are not

Institution Dreams

I'm tired of being locked up even though I'm used to it.
I look back into my life and realize I suffered crucial hits.
Two more weeks maximum till I graduate the hall.
I don't know what I'll do to not live against the law.
I always reminisce but I rarely look ahead.
Tomorrow's never guaranteed for me.
I could be dead.
These institution dreams cloud my head so I look down.
And these methamphetamines wound up my town down to tha ground
I found out two of my homies died from violence and stupidity
Lived a life of fighting, now they finally can rest in peace
I'm 18 years old by now an' kicked out of my house
But I ain't really trippin' 'cause I'll find my whereabouts

-Grumpy

From The Beat: We have very high hopes that you will find your whereabouts, Grumpy. In fact, we know that you are now out of Hillcrest, and we've had the pleasure of having you come to our office, even though it's not easy to get here from San Mateo. To us, that shows that you are serious about looking forward. We know the future must look a little intimidating — and especially since you're now 18 — but that is a challenge which you have the capacity to meet. We still hope you will consider college because it opens up possibilities that we're sure you've never even thought about. But whatever you choose, make sure it isn't the same old stuff that has robbed you of so much already in your young life! We're pulling for you.

I'm sick of waking up in the morning and looking at everyone's depressed and pitiful faces.

I'm Sick

I'm sick of everyone, everything.
I'm sick of having people hate who don't even have a reason.
I'm sick of waking up in the morning
and looking at everyone's depressed and pitiful faces.
I'm sick of people putting others down just because their life is not going right or they want to be a happy person like the people they put down.
I'm sick of waking up in a negative vibe.
I'm sick of never seeing smiles.
I'm sick of wearing others' clothes that's never the right size.
I'm sick of the food.
I'm sick of being locked in a stupid room.
I'm sick of hearing rumors and I don't know why they even exist.
I'm sick of hearing nothing but put-downs.
I'm sick of hearing, "Oh, she said she don't like you."
I'm sick of hearing, "You got an hour, come sign your ticket."
I'm just sick of everyone and everything.
I just wanna go home because I'm sick.

-Lil' Mama

From The Beat: If you are as sick of all this as you say you are, then you will find a way to stay out of here! You don't mention any of the reasons why you are here, but it's related to your own choices, which means that if you continue to make those choices, you're really choosing to be here. And if you make that choice again, the obvious conclusion will be that you don't hate it here as much as you say. You give the system control over your life, then get sick when they take control. Make some changes. It's all in your hands.

The Best Summer I Ever Had

I remember the summer of 2004. It was the best summer I ever had. I was always in my street with my homies, kickin' it and doing desmadre. The summer of 2004 was when I started doing bad things. Every Friday we all went to a swimming pool in Redwood City and we had a lot of fun.

I wish I could go back in time to dose firme days. Chale, I liked dose summer nights, warm nights with the homies, just chilling in the driveway. Now I'm getting older and I'm missing all those times when I was younger. All I know is that the summer of 2004 was the best.

-Lil' Stranger

From The Beat: We hope that the summer of '04 was just the best so far. You have many summers that lie ahead. Do what you know you must do to make them what they should become: sweet memories for your old age.

Tatuajes Invisibles

Todos tenemos tatuajes visibles o invibles, pero el tatuaje que más duele es cuando tus padres no te apollan. Como una vez que se me descompuso el carro y le hable por telefono a mi papa para que me ayudara y me dijo que no me iba ayudar. Entonces esos son unos de los tatuajes que yo llebo adentro de mi alma y corazón.

Otros de los tatuajes que llebas adentros son cuando tu novia te engaña con tu mejor amigo, especialmente si querías mucho esa persona. Tenemos que reconocer que también nosotros marcamos tatuajes en los corazones de nuestros padres, como cuando caemos en la cárcel. Esto es una pena muy grande para los padres, especialmente para las madres. Las madres de nosotros siempre estan ayudando a los hijos en cualquier cosa, no importa que fue la razón, pero nos ayudan.

Otro ejemplo es cuando le marcamos un tatuajes a la mujer de tus hijos que seria tu esposa. Eso le duele mucho porque sientes que no la apoyas y las haces sentir que no te importan tus hijos. Por eso espero que nunca vuelva a pasar cosas como estas y pensar las cosas antes de hacerlas. También hay que tratar de no marcar tatuajes o que no marque tatuajes a nosotros. Es la mejor manera de vivir.

From The Beat: ¿Sabes la razón por la cual tu padre no te pudo ayudar? ¿Le preguntastes? Estamos deacuerdo contigo. Todos estos ejemplos que nos distes son Buenos ejemplos de las cicatrices que debemos procurar que no nos toquen ni dar. Tienes una mente muy abierta y cualquiera que leyera esto diría que has pasado por todas las experiencias y ejemplo que nos has dado. ¿O no?

Invisible Tattoos

We all have visible and invisible tattoos, but the tattoo that hurts the most is when your parents don't support you. Like one time when my car broke down on me and I spoke to my father over the telephone so he could help me, and he told me that he wasn't going to help me. So those are some of the tattoos that I carry inside of my soul and heart.

Other tattoos that you carry inside are when your girlfriend plays on you with your best friend, especially if you loved that person very much. We have to recognize that we also leave tattoos in the hearts of our parents, like when we end up in jail. This is a very shameful thing for our parents, especially for our mothers. Our mothers are always helping out their children in whatever, regardless of what the reason is, but they help us.

Another example is when we leave some tattoos in the woman of your kids who would be your wife. That hurts them a lot because she feels like you don't support her and you make her feel that you don't care about your kids. That's why I hope that these kinds of things never happen again and to think about what you are about to do before doing it. We should also try not to leave tattoos or let people leave tattoos in us. That is the best way to live.

-Juan

From The Beat: Do you know the reason why your father couldn't help you out? Have you ever asked him this? We agree with you. All these examples that you gave us are good examples of the scars that we should make sure don't touch nor we give to others. You have a very open mind and whoever should read this would say that you have been through all the experiences and examples that you have given us. Or are we wrong for assuming this?

We have to recognize that we also leave tattoos in the hearts of our parents, like when we end up in jail.

My Mama

She's my mom and the blood beneath my skin
She's in the depth of my words
She's my heart within
When I heard of the crash I lost all control
The thought of never seeing my ma was killing my soul
Your words are my light and to lose my mom
I would be left in the darkness with nothing in sight
So ma don't scare me to the death
Because without you in my life
I would have nothing left
My love for you is so hard to express
It's because it never stops growing
It's only to progress
I will love you to the end of time
I know that you're my moon above and my morning sunshine
If I could ever speak the words of my heart
I wouldn't ever have nothing to say
So I guess for now all I got is I'm sorry
And Happy Mother's day
I love you
Dedicated to Nancie – Ma

-Lil' Leche

From The Beat: What a wonderful and loving tribute to your mother, Lil' Leche. Speaking these words (or writing them) shows the depth of your feelings, but the real test of love is your willingness to make sacrifices, to give up things you like in the interest of those you love. Are you ready to sacrifice some of the things you like to do — but which give the system power over your life — in order to give your loving mother what she wants most?

Together Forever

Seems like yesterday when I met you. We were going to the dentist together and you was checkin' me out and I was too! You have this baby face and this cute smile when I look at you from across the hall. I'm always telling you that I want to be with you. I tell you I like you and I need you. You are younger than me and I still don't care. I can't wait to see you on the outs.

The reason why I tell you I don't want you to talk to nobody is because, yes, I want you to myself. You already know and you said you want me too. I can't stop thinking about you. I never felt this way over a boy. Usually they want me first, but I want you.

Damn, I really miss you. I want you here with me. I know you have to leave, but it isn't goodbye. It's hello until we meet again. Now I'm worrying about how it's gonna be when you're free and I'm still here. Are you gonna wait for me? I miss you. I wanna say I love you but it's too soon. Well, inside I know I do and when I'm out it's me and you, just like you promised me, together forever!

-Kika

From The Beat: This sounds like a fantasy relationship based on very little reality in a very unreal setting (juvenile hall). We hope that when you are out there you will move forward cautiously until you have a firmer basis for a relationship than a cute smile and "words of love, soft and tender." He may prove to be the love of your life, and we hope he does. But freedom has a way of making things look very different than they look while you're a prisoner, so you may have to make some adjustments.

Dear Grandchild

Times have changed and they sure have changed since I was your age. You're gonna need your education now more than it was ever needed. I'm your grandfather and I'm here to give you advice.

You should go to school. It might be corny and it might be boring, but without it you'll be nowhere, making nothing. I'm sure you'll do the right thing after a couple slip-ups, or maybe you won't get no slip-ups and you'll go straight to doing what's right. I hope that's the choice you make because being in jail or in the streets is all the same. Nothing is there to help you in a positive way and some people never learn or don't get enough time to figure it out.

Sincerely,

-David

From The Beat: We hope you are able to give such valuable advice to a future grandchild. We also hope that you will consider this as advice to yourself, because it is never too late to apply wisdom like this to your own life. If you had received such a letter from your grandfather or grandmother when you were smaller, would it have made a difference in the choices you made?

What Do You See?

Look into my eyes
And tell me what you see
People say a criminal, a gangsta
I'm only a human being
I'm living life just like you
Why you gotta judge me
And tell me you act a fool
I'm not tryin' to hate
Like everyone else
I'm just here to help
I can't do that if I can barely help myself
But I'm tryin' to change
Change into a man
But I can't do that
While I'm stuck in the can
But when I get out
I'ma show up everyone
I'm going be successful
And not be the person on the street called a bum...

-Justin

From The Beat: You have it within you to be whatever you want to be, Justin, which means that if you are determined to prove the haters wrong, you can succeed. When you ask, "Why you gotta judge me," is the question directed at The Beat, people in general, or the system? If it's the system, it's "got to" judge you because that's its purpose. The system will not stop judging, so your best option for the future is the one you've already chosen: Don't give the system power to judge you in a way that interferes with your freedom to make your own choices for your own future.

A Cold World, Part I

I live my life in a cold, cold world
Money, pills, dope
And prostitution of girls
Do anything to get money
It's the "G" life man
Got popped 'cause he looked at 'em funny
I'm telling you, dudes ain't playin'
They live by the "G" code
So you know what that means
They was raised to be cold
And let their cold be seen
Now on the east, well they thuggin'
Ain't really no muggin'
But if you step outta line
It damn sho ain't no huggin'
Now let's take a trip to the west
Where the most people get put to rest
Let's talk about the bay area
Yeah, that's where I stay
People get dropped every single day
Don't get me wrong
It ain't nothing I'm proud of
But you gotta understand
this is vicious, man
You might not make it out
If you ain't got a game plan
(To be continued...)

-Young Royal

From The Beat: North, South, East or West/Staying drama-free is best/Running girls for dough? That's a boy's game/Real men respect women, see their mothers as the same/A cold life of money, pills and dope/ Promises only a bleak future with little hope/Which in your case makes us insane/Since you're blessed with a superior brain/In a society desperately in need of positive leaders/it hurts to see the gifted act like bottom feeders/The world you describe is surely real/But that only makes people like us feel/ That people like you are needed more than ever/Not to harm the world, but to make it better!

My Life, Not Yours

Dear Life
You caught me off guard
So living my life
Became hard
I became a lot of trouble
But no one seen me struggle
You led me on
To do wrong
This ain't a song
And it ain't no rhyme
This is my life
And this time
I want it back
And that's a fact

-John

From The Beat: The prize — your own life — is there for the taking, John. The "trouble" that you've experienced in life have given you a powerful education into the realities of individual behavior and institutional consequences. If you use the lessons you've learned toward your goal of taking your life back, you will be well on your way towards a productive life, the kind that all of us want for ourselves and our children. Go for it!

In My Room

I sit in my room
All alone
Thinking 'bout you and me
An' how things used to be
Goin' back to the days
When it used to be
You and Me
Me and You
I reminisce all them sweet words you said to me
Wishin' that I didn't have to daydream
'Bout havin' you next to me
Touchin' and huggin'
Huggin' and touchin'
Rememberin' when we used to sit at the park
Stayin' late 'till it got dark
Makin' sure no vato or no jaina
Would break us apart
So remember
It's You and Me
Me and You
'Cause all I got left is
To sit in ma room
All alone
Thinkin' 'bout You and Me..
Much love an' respect
I love you

-Brownie and Ms. Grumpy

From The Beat: It makes us kind of sad to think of you reminiscing about such pleasant things from behind locked doors. What are each of your plans for making sure your futures don't involve more lock-ups and sad love poems that draw on the memory of freedom rather than freedom itself?

Dear Life

Dear Life, why you so hard to live?
Why is everything I want to do so hard?
Why is love treating me so bad?
Dear Life, why is this all happening to me?
Is all this happening for a reason?
I ask myself these questions
But I guess one day I will find out, but not now
I already lost a homie.
I don't want to lose another one to realize
That this is my time to change.

-Green Eyes

From The Beat: We're sorry about your homie's death. Like you, we hope it doesn't require any more deaths to make you realize that life in general is precious, and that your life in particular is all you've got! We can't answer the questions you pose to life, but we know that the longer you live, the more those questions will be answered. So, what are the changes you're expecting to make?

I hope that's the choice you make because being in jail or in the streets is all the same.

Visible Tattoos

Visible tattoos—"Cali (fornia) Thuggin'" on my arms
A name on my chest—it's my mom's
My area code on my right side of my chest
It's an area code, also known as the best
"Only God Can Judge Me" on my stomach
Because I'm sick

-Juan

From The Beat: Oh, 'cause you have a tattoo your sick? Sick of what? Sick of who? They're just tattoos homie. Do they give you a special power? If you are going to write about your tats, tell us the reasons behind getting them.

My Life Changed When . . .

My life changed when I got kicked out of school. Ever since I got kicked out of school, it seems like I've been goin' bad. Started doin' things I never used to, like fightin' and drinkin', and other stuff like that. After I got kicked out, I started comin' to the halls for lots of dumb shhh. After I got kicked out, I really didn't give a damn about anything. Really I was doin' my thug thizzle, really.

-Matt

From The Beat: First, why did you get kicked out of school? Do you think that getting kicked out of school was a fair punishment for whatever you did? Can/could you get reinstated into your school next fall? Why are you doing dumb stuff? Why don't you care even more about your life, your future, now that you're forced to be out of school? When will you give a damn? What's your plan for the next chapter of your

Juvenile Hall--Never Again

I want to live my life with not a lot of problems. I would like to have a great career. I also want to get married and have kids. If I would change anything about my life, it would be not coming to JH, never ever again, because it's terrible.

I have thought about being on stage, singing, because I love to sing and dance. Those things are what I enjoy to do. I haven't watched a movie that reminds me of my self story.

-Abigail

From The Beat: You're free already, so you should be on your way to fulfilling your dreams. We hope you are working out some of your problems too. What kind of a career do you strive to have?

Ready To Get Out And Stay Out

Yeah! I get out tomorrow. I can't wait to be free and see my boyfriend. I miss him sooo much. I get to be out and spend time with my family, go back to school, continue living my life. I don't have to be wakened up at 7:00 am, told what to do, when to do it. I'll be able to wear my own clothes, not go to bed at 8:30. I'll be able to show everyone that I'm ready to change my life in a positive way, and most of all, I get out before my seventeenth birthday, which is on June 8th.

Advice to everyone locked up: learn from your experience. If you hate it, don't come back. Don't do something stupid unless you're ready to do the time. Stay out!

-Ariana

From The Beat: You're already out, so Happy Birthday and congratulations on your freedom! How do you want your life to proceed from here? What are your goals, dreams, ambitions for your young life? How do you hope to accomplish them?

Invisible Tattoos

I don't have any tattoos that area visible, but I have invisible scars that have changed my life, like being in here, facing the charges I'm facing.

I've seen a lot of death in my life, from my dad and close relatives.

Just by looking at me on the streets, you would think my life is perfect, because I have money, cars, clothes and girls, but that's nothing, when I think about the loved ones I lost. But when I do start thinking about that, I would go and do something to take my mind off of it, but these are my scars, and other than that, life is good.

-James

From The Beat: How has this experienced scarred you? Is it for the better? Did you lose your loved ones through violence? Even though the pain must torture you, you probably though you figured out a way to deal with it, but obviously your old ways have brought more problems in your life? So, what's the plan to better your life upon getting out of the hall?

learn from your experience. If you hate it (juvenile), don't come back. Don't do something stupid unless you're ready to do the time.

When Am I Getting Out?

Damn! People keep playing with me on court. They keep saying, "Come back next week," and after that, they said a month. After three months I finally started trial. It's a week long. So I hope I get out soon.

-Santiago

From The Beat: Well, Santiago, you're out of juvy, home and free to an extent! All the best!

WALDEN HOUSE PSK

Don't Let The Pressure Make You Plastic

You could travel seas to Atlantic. Use your compass to achieve.
Life's not good to be a thief.
When you walk in the valley of the shadow of death
You take 1, 2, 3, and you take your last breath.
Life ain't funny at all when you got no money.
Value of life is no discount, so don't waste it and try to guide right.
Anything you do depends only on you. Steer your life right.
Ain't nobody on the passenger side, so recover and take any good advice.

-Lil' Payasa

From The Beat: This tight poem reads as a major warning to youth who might not have considered all the potential consequences of their behavior, so we really appreciate it. Can we also get some assurances from you that you are following your own fine advice?

My Life Changed When....

My life changed when my dad went to the hospital to get brain surgery. I couldn't care less about him 'cause I was high on dope, and the reason it changed is not because I stopped doing dope and changed my life around or anything like that. It was like I just started to have compassion for my family members, like I wouldn't yell at my family in front of my niece and nephews or stupid stuff like that.

So my life didn't changed when I started or stopped smoking dope. It changed when my daddy went to the hospital.

-Merrily

From The Beat: What do you think it was about your daddy's hospital stay that made you open your eyes and take notice? How is he now?

I Miss You

Lil' Mookie, I miss you so much. Yeah, this Jasmine from Hayward. Da last time I seen you, we was on Shasta unit doing it big. I got shipped off to Walden House. It ain't that bad, "Best friend." I miss you so much.

The last I head about you, my sister told me you might be going home. You're still locked up, I'm in rehab now, but I'm also 16 now, my ninja. I miss you so much. I hope we get to be together again, but remember this: Lil' Zillah and Lil' Mookie, best friends to the end.

Oh yeah, Debbie crazy self was here, but she gone now. I love you so much and will always be with you.

-Lil' Zillah

From The Beat: What was so special about Lil' Mookie? What made you such special friends? Are you as determined to continue with your recovery as you are to get back together with your "best friend"? We sure hope so, because unless you are ready to face the world sober and in a way that will keep you free, you won't be any good to yourself or to friends.

A Guy

You're hella sweet to me. You keep my head up high. You ask me how I am every time you see me. I can't say I love you, but I can say I miss you. I think about you a lot because you stole my heart when you started to say you want me. I hope you know that I love you, but it is too hard for me to open up to, and give you, my heart because I have been hurt too many times, so don't take it serious when I don't say I love you, but just know I love you and miss you.

-B-Eyes

From The Beat: Well, we're not sure if you just can't make up your mind (you say twice that you can't say you love him, and twice that you love him), or you're afraid to be emotionally hurt if you open up too much. All we can tell you is that love is very risky, but most of us find the risk worth taking. Good luck.

Invisible Tattoos

I got a Baby Taz on my right arm and I got it because I go insane like taz. Taz(manian Devil) always goes around and tears things apart and that's what I do. I go stupid.

-Dirty Nell

From The Beat: Why do you tear things up? For fun? What's fun about destruction? Break it down for us, and think about the downside of tearing things apart.

This Yo' Girl Ashley

Hey Beat! This yo' girl Ashley in this here unit. I was in the other unit, then I got released. I ran from my placement then came back to the Hall. I only got four months confinement time left! Thank goodness. I wanna give a shout out to all the units! Y'all stay up. Hope you guys out already though. I just had a placement review today and should be getting' out this hall in a couple weeks. I'm gonna end up having this confinement time run out. I should be off of probation pretty soon.

-Lay Lay

From The Beat: We hope you don't run this time—seems like when you do that you're just running straight back to the hall.

New Life Ahead

My life changed when I started coming to the hall and when I started doing crimes. I couldn't stop acting up and then all a sudden, the last time I came here they just sent me to a group home and that changed me a lot.

When I got to the group home I just wanted to do my time and get out to be with my family again. I left the group home and turned myself in and now I'm waiting to go back, and when I go back I'm going to complete my program and have a new life ahead of me.

-Kid

From The Beat: What made you decide to leave the group home? And what made you decide to complete the program next time? There's a story behind your story, and we're dying to hear it.

Talk With Dad

My life changed when I had a real conversation with my father about some things that really go on in life. Then I started seeing things a whole different way. I had to cut some people out of my life but it was worth it.

-Listen Up

From The Beat: You're really lucky to be able to talk about real things with your father—we're glad you have someone in your life who respects you and listens to you, as well as shares their wisdom. Did you have this conversation while you were in juvie or before?

My Life Change

I think my life is going to change when I get out of jail. Jail is not the place for me.

The reason I am in here is because of burglary. I've been in jail for about two months and I'm going to get sent to camp.

I know this was going to change something about me. When I get out I want to change because I would have to want to change. My life is going to also change when I have kids.

-Shaun

From The Beat: You got it, change is a choice. You need to want it. You should, like you do want it. Why do you want it? We hope you have the love and support you need on the outs to make the changes you are dreaming about on the inside.

The Hall

My life changed when I started coming to jail in 2003. I knew that things would never be the same again. And I predicted it right because ever since 2003 I been in jail four times after that. And now I believe that I am a disgrace to my family and a shame to my family's last name.

This time when I get out I'm going to make sure this is my final time being locked up. I'm going to do everything right. That's what I plan to do. That's my word.

-Nu Nu

From The Beat: Four times in three years is a lot—we really hope you do make this the last time and stay strong once you get out. The thing to remember is that you're the one who has to live with your mistakes. Although we're sure that your family wants to see you do well, we think they probably care more about your well-being than the family name.

Her Passing

My life changed when my sister passed away when I was only 15 years old. She was my every thing. She's not my only sister but she was the one that was my only thing.

-Loving Sister

From The Beat: We're so sorry for your loss. Losing someone so close when you're still so young is definitely life altering. How did her passing change you? We imagine that the death of a sibling could make you really angry as well as sad and confused. Could you use your love for her to do something positive for yourself in her memory?

Diploma Bound

I Passed my High School exit exam!

-Bianca

From The Beat: We're SOO happy for you! And we're not surprised 'cause we know how smart you are. Congratulations from The Beat!

Them Scars

Once when I was little when I lived in Oakland, I was doing something bad. I was doing something I shouldn't been doing, so I was hopping fences and I hopped a fence and my hands got caught on a gate. Then the gate had a nail on it. Then my hand started bleeding, so I was getting down then I fell off the gate. Then I got 23 scars on my hands and on my arms together. I went home then. My mom put bandages on my scars. Then I started crying.

-Bryant

From The Beat: Ouch! Are the scars still visible on your hands? Are they red or brown? Do they send you reminders about staying safe, or are they badges of courage? You are a great storyteller, don't stop.

What Am I Goin' To Do

Time for me to do what I got to do
every day I think I'm about to go soon
so what am I going to do
Man I have no clue
Having no clue is like having the flu
I'm so sick of you man it feel like I'm in doom

-Money Maker

From The Beat: Knowing that you don't know the answers puts you ahead of all the people who THINK they've got the answers when they really don't. You can start by asking yourself what kind of life you want. Once you know what you want, you can start figuring out (and hopefully telling The Beat), how to get it.

State of Emergency

Where I'm from is a state of emergency.

Where I'm from you can't be outside with out a gun. Where I'm from you have to know how to mack a chick. Where I'm from we go hard in the paint.

Me and my ninjas go hard.
What you think it ain't.
It's real pimpin' on mine we go hard in the paint.
Swang that thang this way.
If you know better, swang that thang this way,
you will do better.

-David

From The Beat: This state of emergency doesn't sound like anything to be excited about. Why do you and your friends go so hard? Do you like it, really? Or is it what you know, what you feel you have to do? Do you wish you could walk outside without a gun? Well in truth you can. You have to want to do right and packing a gun is not living right. How bad do you want to see tomorrow as a free man? Once you get your freedom back we hope you are way smarter than the piece you wrote for us. If not, well, we will see you again!

Hood Life

Hood smoking pot in the hood
Living my life in the hall.
Hood doing it big in the hood that's how it is
Living life in Oakland
where brothers kill each other and shed blood.
Hood running from the police
that's what we do in the hood
that's hood business
pimp.
Living the thug life.
In the hood popping pills
that's what takes place in the hood
Living life in the hood now that's hood business.

G-Money

From The Beat: You are a natural poet, and you're telling the sad story of the Oakland streets. People need to hear the story. They need to know how real it is that young black men are killing each other. Now tell us what changes are you attempting to make to better your life?

What I Miss Doing

Well, here I am in Camp, thinking how I'm going to feel without my syrup! Right now I feel like it's no such thing as syrup. I was just in school today, and me and a couple of ninjas was talking about how we used to sip syrup and how we missing sipping that stuff!

Well, for those of you that sip syrup and just sip it, it's not like drank. You will do all types of things. You can go to Denny's and put it on them hot pancakes and sausages; or you can eat it with your breakfast at home, on something like cereal and milk.

And Beat Within, if you guys don't know what syrup is editor, it is promethazine mix with codeine. It is a medicine, like Nyquil. Some people call it lean, or syrup.

-Lil' Dee

From The Beat: We've mainly heard it called "bo" (short for Robitussin), and we're just beginning to understand how very widespread its use is as a mind/mood altering substance with young people in the hood today, right up there with ecstasy, marijuana and alcohol abuse among your youth. We're not against young people feeling good, but if you get your life together the good feeling will last a lot longer than that high, you know, like an entire lifetime. Don't you want more from life?

What Attracts Breezies

Jabos
Jordons
Button Ups
White Ts
Fitted Hats
Stunners
Grill
Jewelry
Dboys
Hustlers
Pimps
Players
Bosses
Rappers
Dancers
Motorcycle Riders
Scrapers
24-inch rims
4-inch speakers
CD players
Vans
Harleys
Guns
Drug game

-Young Tay

From The Beat: A man can start selling his soul inch by inch to get what he thinks he wants – the admiration and attention of women...and not wake up until it's too late. You are better than every single one of these items on your list, and the girl who deserves you will be as well.

When My Life Changed

My life changed when I started going to the Hall and didn't give a damn — not going to school, smoking hella weed, poppin' pills. My life changed so quick and so fast.

It didn't make no sense why I been doing this stuff, but it get hectic where I'm from, so I cant really say I'm going to change. 'Cause the same stuff going to be going on when I get to the out. I know that really it is up to me to do the right thing, but life goes on, even when I'm gone. So I'm just going to live to the fullest! So till next time. All right then, Beat.

-Lil' Quesada

From The Beat: You don't think being locked up in the Hall is living life to the fullest do you? And if you keep living like this, you'll find yourself locked up somewhere when you should be on the out, falling in love, getting a job, starting a family. Losing out on those things isn't living life to the fullest. You think those old addicts you see in the street are living life to the fullest? No.

School At Camp

School is okay here at Camp. I just hope I get my GED while I'm in here!

When I used to go to school in the out, I didn't really go a lot. I used to ditch school. I'm glad I'm going to school here. And I don't talk a lot, so I stay out of trouble and I get my work done.

I hope I pass my GED — and get a job! I want to make my parents proud that I get my GED. And, hopefully, after that, I can go to a community college.

-Ismael

From The Beat: Your eyes are open and you're seeing clear. And you've shut your mouth and opened your ears since you've been going to school in here. It's all good! Your parents will be proud of you, not only 'cause of what you're doing but who you've become — someone on the right track! Just don't slip back.

Question from The Beat:

Do You Believe That Your Day To Go Has Already Been Chosen

Now?

No. Because if you know what I been through, which I always talk about in The Beat, I just got to pull my act back together, and be cool, 'cause God has a plan for me for when I go out to the world, or He wouldn't have given me another chance, because I came in here on some serious stuff and the Lord answered my prayers and is sending me to a group home in Los Angeles for six to nine months.

I'm blessed: that's what I believe. I got a long way you see.

-Baby Lou

From The Beat: We believe you, we believe you have a long way, we believe you are blessed, we believe you can do and be anything you want. So remember that at the group home, and write the Beat Without so we know where the journey is taking you.

My Dream of Change

My life changed, when I first got my dream of change. The reason why I changed, is because my dream told me to slow down or else I was go' to got killed by my friends.

My dream told me that one of them was going to kill me for drug money out on the spot where I set up shop. But that's why my life is going to change, because I love myself and my loved ones

John-John (RIP), I'll be there one day. Sorry that you are not here. We love you and miss you, Uncle John-John. RIP John-John.

-Fat Ab

From The Beat: We are so glad you had that dream to warn you about what will happen if you don't quit the game. "Slow down" doesn't work though. You really need to find another way to get paid and let that old life go. That's what your dream is trying to say. Get off that spot and find a better way to get paid.

06-06-06

My birthday, I'm'a get a temporary release from Camp, and I'm'a get hella perved! I'm'a go to the store and get me like two bottles first thing when I'm out.

Then I'm gonna call my girl and tell her to call some friends to come through my house. We gonna get hella drunk, and then get some of that female companionship for an hour or two. You know what I'm sayin'? I'm'a keep drinking till its time for me to come back to Camp.

I think I'm gonna go to a buffet with my girl, mom and my brothers. Hopefully, next year, I won't be in a institution for my eighteenth birthday. I'm out. Wassup, Alfonso, up in san Mateo, Hillcrest; it's Vale. Stay up homie. Don't trip.

-Clumsy

From The Beat: What can we say? It's your eighteenth birthday! But give yourself a present you can really use. Give yourself a better life than the one you used to choose. There's more to happiness than getting drunk and laid. Get a legal job to get paid. Get your HS degree or your GED, so you can get a better j-o-b.

Finish Line

Man all this shhh ain't working for me. These ninety days taking too long. I need to see my girl. I ain't seen here in months. I know she miss me, I miss her too.

Before I met her I really didn't have much. I had a little, but not what I got now. I love her like rain hit the ground when it's pouring. I never found no one the way I love her. Her whole family love me. Well the ones that I met so far. And I love each and very one of them. When I get out I'm a be cool and get me a job and take care of Me, Alexis, and me and her family.

-Lb

From The Beat: "I love her like rain hit the ground" Now that's a poetry of the heart right there. Keep that promise to yourself and your girl, and when you get out, be cool!

Eternal Scar

This scar hurts in both ways 'cause it stands out, well the body language. Also the pain in my head. This eternal scar can't be showed or told about . It hurts every second of my life 'cause others betrayed us. So I lay in this little room and think with my head in The Bible. Yeah I also pray.

But God told us it's an eternal scar, so I walked around hooded up in the night like a cheetah looking for my eternal scar.

Wounds from head to toe, but not this scar. Can't blame time, 'cause it's gon' always get hard. Especially this gun charge.

-Markese

From The Beat: Is that scar just there to hurt you, or is it something you can learn from, something that can give you courage and hope?

Hella Drank, Hella Drunk

On my home visit last weekend, when I went to the house, Moms was trippin'! So I cut on her bad self. She was hella mad because when I'd first come home, I got hella drunk.

What happened was, I was at my boy's house messin' wit' this female, and stuff, and gettin' drunk. Some was gettin' high, but I was like, "No bra, I can't even do it, because I get pee-tested. So if I smoke, it's all bad bra." So then I just kept drinkin'.

When I went home, moms was trippin'. When she stopped, I went back outside and got even drunker. When I went back into the house and got on the phone wit' some girl, I started throwin' up! So I told that broad I had to go, and I threw up a few more times.

Then I said to myself, "I ain't never goin' drinkin' no more!" Then I passed out, right there next to the toilet I had been throwin' up in! I woke up in the morning and was like, "Where the hell am I?" I got up got in the shower, got dressed, and did the same thang all over again. My H.V. went dumb!

-Baby Boi

From The Beat: Yeah, we see the pattern. You're smart, but you choose to "go dumb" — it brings you misery and pain, but when that part's over, you go back to the same old thang. You think we're talking about drink, but we're talking about everything you do and the way you think. Look where you are now! Keep on like this, and we'll see you back in the Hall praying to get out. You are far to intelligent for this type of self-negligence. Grow up Baby Boi, or stay the system's toy.

Step Yo' Game Up

This Bra Dummy, and y'all need to step y'all game up! There are many hustles other than standin' on the corners. Use some of your other talents and don't be embarrassed. If you can sing, do that! If you can tap, do that! If you' funny as hell, then be a comedian!

Whatever you're good at, make it an option — besides the streets. Find a legit job and keep it! And if you still want to sell, then don't go where you' putting yourself at risk. Do it the smart way. Remember its not what you do, it's how you do it. I hope y'all take some of this knowledge and feed off of it, but if not, y'all be right back here in jail. So step yo' game up!

-Bra Dummy

From The Beat: What you say here is true as can be. The problem is where you offer the option of playing the game smarter, 'cause it's harder than you think — to stay in the game and keep your sanity from starting to sink to the level of your competition, 'cause the devil fills your mind with thoughts of what you're missing and you've already made the decision to make the rules for yourself. Stick to the first part — find a legal way to make your wealth. There's so much talent and intelligence getting wasted in the street, or placed in the system, or buried deep.

RIP

The ball player Aubrey Johnson was killed down the street from my house, and I miss my dad. But I can't do nothing now, but miss him. I want revenge but my mom said let the police get him.

It's all good that person going to get his in the future. RIP dad.

-Lil' Pug

From The Beat: Karma has a way of bringing justice. If you go after revenge you may end up suffering more. Take your moms advice. Life is precious as you know, you have a long life to live, now live it legitly in honor of those you love.

My Life Changed When

my life changed — right now
right this second i'm ready
to get up outta here and live the good life
you know anybody can make a change
you jus' gotta be ready to
and be dedicated to do it too
but be safe stay solid

-No Name

From The Beat: You left your name of this testimony to change! You can't both change and hide out at the same time. Forget those fools who might call you soft for quitting a life of crime.

You Know

trials and tribulation
so much anger and frustration
fighting city to city all across the nation
hood to hood ninjas up to no good
lil' homies puttin' it down
bangin' on suckas from different towns
east side of the bay is where is stay
gangstas putting the smash down
you better run and hide when they come around
time to lace up the cortez and cuff the ben's
get out there and make some ends
stop acting like suckas and bein' pretend
my goons are ready to get the cash
smashin' trying to keep themselves from crashin'
be on point be coo' off smokin' ya joint
stay out of jail or else your gonna be eatin' food that's stale

-H-Fella

From The Beat: You mind is slipping back to the same old mind set that got you sent her to maximum security. Everybody wants to stay out of jail, but if you keep living a life of crime it's just a matter of time before they put you in a cell. Why are you encouraging that old life style? It still gives you ego strokes to write about living wild? You're smarter than that. Don't let vanity take you off track.

Every Time

Every time I think of you
I feel the sensation again
Of loving you
And missing you like you
Could never imagine
What I want right now is to hold you in my arms
And tell you just how much I love you.
And how much I want you in my life
Please... don't ever doubt my love for you.
Because it is as real today
As it was the day we first began to share a love.

-D

From The Beat: This is the first of many of your poems that we are pleased to be printing in The Beat. You have been writing great pieces all along, but it's terrific to see you branching out into poetry!

Stories Behind The Physical Part of Me

If you see tattoos on me, it's because it's about where I'm from. My brother and also my cousin have this tattoo. We got it after we was funkin' with some ninjas, and we proved we had the heart to do what we did and if you funkin' wit' one of us, you funkin' wit' all of us.

Another is about this scar or wound behind my arm on the side of my ribs is a bullet mark, it still look like a hole in my side. I got shot protecting my lil' bra in Richmond, I ain't mad because I already know about karma, and that person that hit me got bad karma. I got a long scar on my arm from jumping out a bando window after my potna got shot in the head. Like as soon as it hit dark and quick drive by, while I was in the middle of it all, in a bando smokin'. I regretted not being there, so that's probably why I got cut by the glass when I jumped out.

RIP Meech, Armon...Neva forgotten.

-K

From The Beat: We know you have heart, we see it in every piece you write for us. We think that heart and courage would be wasted if you continue to fight and funk, you could be a leader who uplifted your whole neighborhood, you and your boys, maybe that's part of your karma!

Ain't Never Changed

my life ain't changed
ain't never changed
ain't nothin' changed
but the numbers in the range
copped me a old school
put it on thangs
my sprewells spinning
man i'm putting oakland
on the map and
youngsta still in trouble
now i'm stuck in camp.

-Lil' Jonah

From The Beat: The map you're drawing has five-oh calling out yo' name. You don't need that kind of fame. Choose a wiser path to fortune, a path that doesn't lead to pain.

Obstacle, The Movie

Yes, I saw "my life" in a movie. I remember when I was watching the movie called Obstacle. It's like a 'hood movie that talks about Oakland and how some of the people here really grow up. But it's one other movie that I wanted to live like — and that would be The Fifth Element.

-Anthony

From The Beat: We take it you don't mean the cab driver in The Fifth Element, but the advanced-race heroine. We'll have to check out "The Obstacle" on DVD.

A Poem

When I look in your eyes
I could always see my life
And the future for us looks so great,
I never thought I would have days so nice
I already pray everyday
I wish I can have more then just years of being with you
I want forever
Because I'm cherishing every moment I spend with you
Your body is like a temple
Something that I highly value the most
You are so beautiful when you smile
But it's your inside's that glow from head to toe
I want my lips to touch your body
I want to go deeper in your love
And give you all the love that is inside me
All the stuff you can give
It's you that I need
Your love too
Because it's so strong
That's why I want it.

-Casey

From The Beat: Ahh... love. We say it over and over again: Love is something that can only blossom with a relationship. If you're life is spent in and out of jail, then your relationship will suffer. If this love is the most important thing to you, then you need to think about your lifestyle. Much love. Lastly, it takes two to tango! So if the person of your dreams is not feeling you, you can't force it. Best to you.

What Up Beat

What up Beat, I writing because I been in this Hell-hole for a minute and I miss my girl. I'm getting mad about this bullshhh.

Me and my baby stayed together every day we have fun everyday I can really say that I love my baby and she love me and we going to be together forever and I'm going to get her name tattooed on me and I know she going to like it. I hope I can make her my wife one day, well I can say that I am going to make her my wife. I love her and she got my love and respect, that's all I want to say.

-Lil' Meika

From The Beat: We say it over and over again – if you really want to have this relationship grow, you MUST get your life together. There's no way you can have a productive relationship while you are incarcerated. That's all WE want to say.

Change Is Good

my life's going to
change
when i want it to
change
because you have to want to
change
you ain't just gone
change
because somebody tell you to
change
to me
change
is the best thing since the washing machine
change
is the thing that is going to keep me out of jail
but that is if it's a good
change
before i came to jail i wasn't thinking of going to school
but today i want to go to school and that's a good
change
real talk

-Rap

From The Beat: In fact no one ever changes just because someone else tells him or her to change. You have to want to change, 'cause at the end of the day (or week or month or whatever), you will do what you want. Of course, there may be a war inside you, 'cause you want this and that, good and bad. Just keep strengthening the good that you want and it will be good for you in the end. If you go bad, you get bad back again.

Another Day

(part one:)
do you want
the same relationship
that i want
that's perfect
'cause every moment
that i spend in yo' hands
feel worth it
to manifest my love
you got to believe me
that i would rather die
than sit through pain
thinkin' about you
if you leave me
doin' this time ain't easy
but i could only be
fo' so long
before these moments turn great
if only i could just hold on
read, write, work out
and write poems
is what i do in my cell
sittin' in hell
until the moments
you come through
all the pain and hurt is gone
seem like you drained it away
just the couple of minutes
you give me
is so strong that i could
make it through another day
(part two:)
i feel like you
puttin' me down
in front of my sister
to be like you can't
keep a man
and i got a hard time
gettin' rid of one affect

-No Name

From The Beat: Are these two days side by side? Or the same day, with different feelings inside? Relationships to ones we love on the outs, are what fill us with hope and fill us with doubts. Take the best and leave the rest, 'cause in the end it's you by yourself who'll have to pass the test of becoming the person you need to be — someone who can stay out of trouble and live safe and free!

On One Part Three

JT: Ring! Ring!
TS: JT, ninja, yo' phone ringing.
JT: Oh shoot! Hello.
TL: It's me.
JT: Ninja, where you at?
TS: Put that ninja on speaker phone.
JT: Ninja, shut up.
TL: I'm in jail.
TS: Man, what happened?
JT: When you go to court?
TL: Tomorrow, ninja.
TS: We will be there.
JT: But not the way you think.
TS: What time?
TL: Eight o'clock.
JT: Well, we will see you then.
TL: Ay, man, I gotta go.
TS: All right then, ninja.
JT: Ay, call that ninja, Sleep.
TS: All right, just be ready in the morning.
JT – TS: zzzzzzzzzzzzzzz
JT: Ninja wake up. It's six thirty! Get yo' self in the shower.
TS: You got me messed up!
JT: Ninja, did you call Sleep?
TS: He should be on his way.
Sleep: Knock, knock, knock.
JT: Get the door.
TS: Who is it?
JT: Now you know what, ninja don't really talk.
TS: I forgot.
JT: Just get the door, punk!
TS: Forget that shower, ninja, let's roll out
JT: Let's do it.
TS: Sceeeert!
JT: Park right here, ninja.
TS: Twenty minutes past, and the bus still ain't here, ninja!
JT: There they go. Get yo'self ready.
TS: Let's do it!
BUS: Sceeert! (and comes to a stop)
TS – JT: La, la, la, la, la, la, lach, ch, boom, ch, ch boom!
JT: Get the keys, ninja.
TS: Watch out, JT!
JT: Oh shhh, ch, ch boom. What?
TL: Man, we go' get down though.
TS – JT: That what we do do la la.
JT: Let's get the what outta here.
TSL Oh no, five-oh comin'!
JT: Get the what in the car.
TL: Stomp that thang, JT boi!
JT: Sceeert!
TL: Hit the way-way!
TS: Five-oh behind us, ninja!
JT: Don't even trip. Watch this!
TL: Watch what, ninja? Oh man, be coo'.
TS: Oohh no.
JT: Shut up, ninja! We got this doooo wooop.
[To Be Continued.]

Lil' JT, Lil' TL, Lil' TS

From The Beat: You can keep the lively back-and-forth dialogue, but you really need to take this little piece up a level, or two. Shoot-out's are not funny events (which we cutout), and we are not laughing with you. Maybe because, most specifically, we remember Man-Man who wrote longer, wordier dialogues for us a couple of years back, with all the crazy talk but also at least a debate among the voices as to what's right, what's wrong, what's smart and what's just plain dumb. He ended up writing dialogues between his "angel" and his "devil" (two voices, as it were, in his head). We pulled for the angel, and for a while, that's how it looked even after he got shipped to YA. Then he stopped writing us from the Y. Then, when he finally did get out, he was out for only a minute, got in a real-life shoot-out with Alameda County Sheriffs, and may never see the world outside of prison again. Believe us, please, this is not funny material. Wake up!

Life Struggle And Get Back

Man I'm locked up again in this juvenile hall. I'm so mad because I got violated just for smoking a cigarette. But I feel I need to change and stop coming to this place.

I need to start playing football and start doing things that'll never be forgotten. I want to be remembered. So my goal is to go to this group home and work my program and get off probation, then I can live a regular life. It's crazy my nephew is about to start playing football and he's only six years old.

My life is going to be harder because I have a little sister and she's only five years old and she's half black half white, and I know that she's going to be hella pretty. When she gets older I'm going to make sure nobody plays my sister like they are a pimp or something. I'm going to go bad and probably go to jail for that. So I need to get my life together and get prepared.

-Lil' Hen

From The Beat: Lil' Hen, we respect that you want to protect your sister, but come on now, you don't have to do something that will take you to jail. Live your life in a positive way. Set a good example for your sister. Treat females how you want you sister to be treated. If you can set this kind of example for her, then she'll set higher goals for herself. Ya' feel? Oh yeah, and stop smoking cigarettes.

Drugs Changed Me

My life changed when I started selling drugs.

-Young Money

From The Beat: Obviously it changed for the worst. Stop selling drugs! How can you change your life for the better?

My Life

My life changed when my ninja Marcellus died because he was a big brother to me and I didn't even get to spend time with him while he was alive because I was in here. I know he's in a better place watching over me, so I'm a keep it solid for my bra.

-Ko

From The Beat: How did your life change? When someone close to us passes, we should realize how precious life is – and value our own. Live life, by taking care of yours. Peace.

When My Life Changed

My life changed when she entered into my life
She said she'll be there she said she'll be my future wife
I want her to be my future baby mamma
Even though we been through so much drama
I miss her like crazy
And I'm stressing in here
All I wanna do is hear her voice over and over again
But once I get out I'm-a start all over from the beginning.

-Kam

From The Beat: Get your life together, then you can start a future with her, but until then...

This Is For The Artist

This is for my homie. He is locked up right now. It's looking like it's gonna be a while 'till I see him again.

The reason I wanted to write this is because last week when The Beat came, I noticed his drawings on the cover. I looked at it and without a doubt, I knew it was his work. I've known him for kind of a long time. But because of me and him being in and out of the system, I only got a short time to kick it with him. In that short time, me and him went through a lot and did it big. I also realized how much of a true solid partner he was. So, to wrap this up short, all I want to say is, keep it solid and keep yo' head up.

-Milkman

From The Beat: Don't you think it is a shame that BOTH of you are locked up? There is a real problem when you AND your friends are coming in and out of the Hall. What's the reason you and your community are ending up here? Think about your life before you end up in such a predicament like your homie who is soon off to CYA.

My Girl

My life changed when I met my girl Nadin. When I met her, I knew we was meant for each other.

She's my girl. Right now we're having a baby, so when I get out of the Hall, my responsibility is to provide for my baby and my girl. Even though I cheat on her, I still got love for her because she having my baby.

-Hasani

From The Beat: Don't confuse love with responsibility. If you truly love her you will show her respect, by not cheating on her. How do you think your child will feel about his/her dad, cheating on his/her mom? If you are going to take care of your responsibility, do it responsibly, not selfishly. Come on Hasani, you know what's the right thing to do. It won't be easy, but it will be rewarding.

My Life

My life changed when I started going to high school. It seem like I started hanging around with different people.

I started doing bad things like not going to school and fighting other people and all that started leading to me getting lock up. So I've been here like eight times and I think I should make a new change and start doing good.

-Gio

From The Beat: DUH! Look at where your life is going. NOW is the time to change – or you will REALLY regret you decisions.

Hall Life Changed Me

My life changed when I came in the Hall. I did sometime for standing on the block with some weed in my mouth.

-Lil' Tay

From The Beat: How has your life changed?

Court Makes Me Wait and Makes Me Mad

I go to court, and they make me come back, every single time! I get so mad! I just don't know what to do. I go to court to fight my case so as not to be tried as an grown man!

I'm hoping to get out on June fifth. If not, I will go to the CYA and do time for something I did not do! When I get out, I am going to try not to be riding in the street like we were before. I'm am going to try to do that, because I have a family to take care of now.

-Sarillo

From The Beat: Yes, you will need to try hard not to go back to how you were living before, because even though you did not do the crime for which you may or may not have to do adult time, the life you were living set you up to take the fall. You probably thought you were only putting yourself at risk out there, but you were putting your family at risk, too, because now they've lost you for a while. When you get out, change your life style!

So-Called Poem, Called "Lock Up"

i'm sitting, wondering why i'm in here
i'm sitting, looking at these four walls
i'm thinking to myself like man i'm wearing
other people' drawers and shoes
i'm thinking to myself like i got to wait
to they come to my room to put the key in the
door knob
thought that was them just now but wasn't

-It's Yo' Boy

From The Beat: Yeah, that sitting in your cell will have you thinking how this lock-up life is like being in hell. And suddenly you'll be able to write poems that tell how you feel it as well.

Few Years

My life changed when the judge said three years, four months in the "Y". I remember I used to say to my folks that I was never gonna touch the Y. Now a few years later, I'm 'bout to do some time there for something I did when I was like fifteen years old.

I just couldn't do my placement time. I'm 'bout to be eighteen in two months and might get out when I'm nineteen, if I do coo' there. But I think it's impossible to do a good program in a negative place like the "Y". But here's just one example of an event that changed my life, and this is right now I'm writing about. All right then, Beat. Peace out.

-Rae

From The Beat: We never thought you'd see the Y either. It's not that you looked or sounded like an angel in workshops or in our pages, but you didn't seem to be locked into a cycle of impulsive, thoughtless or violent criminal acts, like so many of your peers. However, when the system becomes convinced that you will never finish any placement they put you in, they will send you to the Y. It doesn't seem fair to be still serving time for a crime committed years ago that never got you a serious sentence to begin with — but if you keep running, well, it's a sad waste of time and resources (yours and the system's).

Rough Teenage Years

I turned thirteen year's old. I started smoking, drinking, poppin', and doing all kinds of shhh. My attitude has also changed. I started hangin' with grown man and getting so drunk I sometimes would blackout. I didn't know what happened to me when I was around them people. Some of them I barely even knew and blacked out.

When it happened around certain people I wouldn't really care. My friends would sometimes help me out but when they was busy they would let things happen to me.

-Shantell

From The Beat: Shantell, sounds like you got some pretty messed up friends. NOW is a good time to change your life as well. You see where this life has brought you, don't you think you need a change?

The Way Life is for Me

The way life is for me it's hard, but it's fun. But it's not always fun, 'cause people just get killed out of nowhere, but you got to live with it.

You know, but me I live my life to the fullest, you know doing what I want and feel. So the way life is for me it's good but the bad times is coming in here but to all of my people in this BS, keep yo' head up.

-Baby Lou

From The Beat: No, no, no, there are plenty of ways to have the thrill of an exciting life without having the pain of grimy streets and fallen friends and losing your freedom. You don't have to live with any of this, you just need to hook up with some people who are trying to change it.

Right Now

My life changed when I went to juvenile hall. I dislike their food and I miss the mall. And when I get out I'm going to follow the rules and do well in school.

-Kevin

From The Beat: Good for you for planning to do well in school. What challenges will you face? Friends calling you square? Teachers you don't like? Hard classes? What will feel good about school?

My Life Will Change When

I don't think there's anything to change in my life but hanging with the wrong people at the wrong time, and that is what got me locked up. So the only thing I have to change is being around the wrong people.

-D-Lo

From The Beat: So how will you do what you know must be done? Need suggestions? Ask us!

Keep Ya Head Up

What's up Beat? I'm want to say something to Lil' Kev, who's going to the "Y" (CYA). I just want to say keep ya head up, do what you got to do.

This your homeboy, I haven't talk to you since you got caught that day with my bro and cousin. Keep ya head up and stay safe man.

This ya boy Saephanh, hope my work will get in The Beat paper so he could read it.

-Saephanh

From The Beat: You are a good friend. Doing what you've got to do, means doing the right thing. We hope that you take your own advice, you are in a situation where you need to do what you've gotta do (the right thing), to keep yourself from being incarcerated.

What I Like

my name d-nuts
that's what moms call me
and my friends too
you know when i am on the outs
i like to ride in my scraper and slap oldies
you know that's what i go dumb to
you know when i am on the street
i like to have my pockets thick
i also like to scrape with my baddest girl
you know in oakland you have to have
the baddest lil' pearl you know
one of the beautiful girls
one that's down for the world

-D

From The Beat: What you have to have is a life style that keeps you out in the free world, 'cause you can have all that for a minute or two of fame — and then get retired from the street game to all that penitentiary pain or sent to an early grave. Get your life right, or become another statistic that used to ride high.

My Freedom

I get out in a day. I can't wait to get out and do something good. I'm not going to lie and say I'm not going to do bad. I'll do a lot of that too but doing good will be a little harder but I think I could do it. It can't hurt to try. I've had four and a half months. I'm ready to do something productive, instead of messin' shhh up all the time.

I miss my niece and nephews the most. I don't want them to grow up and all they know is me being locked up. I don't know what I'm going to do, so I hope it comes in a day. Or in a dream, if you know what I mean. Well this is the last time you will hear from me—or is it?

-Phillip

From The Beat: We hope you take advantage of this chance to do something proactive for yourself. It can be really good to think of people who look up to us—like nieces and nephews—when we're reevaluating the lives we lead. Best of luck to you.

Two Tattoos For Pops

I have two tattoos, but they go together. The both on my forearms. One says Lil' and the other says Tank. The reason why I got these tattoos is because my pop's is in the military (Air Force) and because he was big, so I being his son I adopted the name Lil' Tank. When I was sixteen, I got it tattooed.

-Tank

From The Beat: That's a cool tribute to Pops. Now stay out of the Hall and be good for Pops!

The Cycle

My life changed when I went to the hall for my first time. The reason my life changed the first time I went to the hall was because I knew I was going to come back, but it wasn't what I wanted.

-Soane

From The Beat: How did you know you'd come back after the first time? It's scary to want something, and to feel it's beyond your grasp. Tell us more about why you knew you wouldn't get what you wanted.

Love

Who do you love
Your mom, girl, your best friend that's a thug
Love
What do you love
Smokin' drinkin' and bustin' slugs
Who and what I love
All the above
Beside bustin' slugs
Don't 'cause I'm not a thug
So now I don't care what you love
'Cause you the one who tried...
I love to sit on my female's couch
So everybody know you fake
You love that girl in the wrong way, treatin' her the wrong way
What can I say
I love my girl and mom in a special way
Love
What should you love
Should you love the person you just met
Or should you love the girl who gave you something
Or maybe you haven't found love just yet
So love
I've found love and still in love

-Ally Bo

From The Beat: We had a lot of questions about this poem... who is the "you" that you're talking about? Friends, enemies, anyone out on the street trying to find love? Do you feel like you've found love just yet, and will that love help you stay away from "bustin' slugs?"

Life Changed At Ten

Hey, what's up, Beat? I wanna say what's up to everyone! This is Yoyo. This week, I'm going to write about how my life changed. My life changed when I was ten years old.

I started hanging with the wrong people, the kind of people who chill on the block. As soon as I came home from school, I'd do my homework and go outside. When I was twelve years old, I started smoking and getting drunk.

I was doing good in school till the Eighth Grade. Then I started messing up. I started getting into fights, too. Then I got kicked out of school. Everything I did was a bad choice, and it all led to me getting locked up. So, this is when my life changed.

-Yoyo

From The Beat: Are you marking two points of change? The first when you turned ten, and your journey down this road of trouble first began. The second moment of change is now, 'cause you don't want to keep getting locked up, no way, no how!

Get it How We Live And Get It How We Be

What's up Beat this is Onio, just in max with my potna Man Man, we keeping it lit. People always telling but it's good we will get out again one day they ain't hold us forever. My potna keep it solid, we always going to be in the game and remain the same that just us and were where we came from.

This here goes out to loved ones, lost in the struggle. It's only right fear God!! I miss you JuJu, and if heaven got a liquor store, put a bottle on hold.

-Onio

From The Beat: Firsdt off we cut a part of your glorifying piece, yet there's a spirit and will and courage beating through this piece – like you said a belief that you can "make something out of nothing." But how? Going back to the corner will just wind you back in here or worse, so what is your plan to get out of this deathtrap. The kind of "keep it solid" you're talking about here will just crumble like a stale twinkie, you need another plan.

when I was ten years old.
I started hanging with the wrong people,
the kind of people who chill on the block.

What is Money To Me

Money is me
Money is peace
Money is my mind
Money is my time
Money is how I shine
Money is why I grind

-Young Tay

From The Beat: Money is an illusion. Yeah you need enough to live on, but true shining doesn't come from that. We know that because we've seen you shine.

RIP Rob

Rob was solid,
he always told me to keep it solid,
so that is what I am going to do.
I love you bra.
I know you are in a better place.

-Db

From The Beat: We're sorry to hear about the death of Rob in these pages, and sorry you had to lose someone you care about. As we write this, the homicide rate in Oakland is almost twice what it was same time last year. Do you have any ideas for what we can do to stop the tragic violence?

RIP Mall

RIP to my bra, because I miss you.
Why did you have to die?
What did you do to deserve it?
I'm sorry, but what could you do?
Hope you in a happier place.

-Lil' Lik

From The Beat: When someone close to us passes, it makes us think about our own life. Where is yours headed? RIP Mall.

To My Brother

We always had hard times, but we got through it with some cries, but it's all good because you will remain my bra through ups and downs. Yeah I am still independent – always. Because why depend on someone...?

Whenever you can get anything yourself, anything's possible. But I have dreams in life. And you my bra to the end.

-Tori

From The Beat: Anything is possible. But to make the possible happen, you must make the effort. Depending on others can be productive, but you're right, you must be able to depend on yourself first.

SANTA CRUZ

When It Was Hard To See

This is Casper, locked up again in juvy.
This is for someone special in my life and it goes like this:

I know you're the one for me.
You opened my eyes when it was hard to see.
Nobody believes me, but you always do.
Baby, I'm just thankful that I found you.
The way you smile at me makes me feel good inside.
And when I'm with you I forget about my pride.
I'm sure that God sent you straight from above.
I'm so very thankful that it's me you love.
What would I do if you ever left my side?
Just thinking about it brings tears to my eyes.
Baby I love you and I know you love me too.
No one will ever love you the way I do.
Believe me when I say how much I love you.

-Casper

From The Beat: Casper, you caught us in a soft moment. We don't usually print love poems. We continue to believe that most of the writing in The Beat should be aimed at a broad audience and not just one person. But we're relaxing our rules in this case. And by the way – nice poem.

Anibal's Observations

If you have nothing to prove, then you have no one to impress.
If you have no one to impress, then you have nothing to stress.
If you have nothing to stress, my friend, that's life at its very best.

-Anibal

From The Beat: Pretty wise stuff Anibal. How'd you get so smart?

A Movie I Relate To

I relate to the movie "Blood In, Blood Out" and living for the gang. It's too bad now I have to go to prison for it. I never thought that would happen to me. But I always knew that the things I did could end me prison. I just hoped I wouldn't have to go praying for a second chance.

-Too late

From The Beat: If you get that second chance, we sure hope you'll change your behavior. What would you do with a second chance?

What I Miss

I miss my music notes. I miss kickin' it with my homeboys. I miss my cousins. Their names are Stokes, Roach and David. I should see you all soon. I am stuck up in Santa Cruz. I know y'all ain't going anywhere soon. Hopefully you're already gone, but if not, this should catch your eye. So keep your heads up. Much love.

-P

From The Beat: We understand wanting to say hi to your homies. But if you were counting on this piece reaching incarcerated youths in San Jose juvy, we must tell you two things. One: The Beat doesn't exist for direct communication between juvies, and two: The Beat Within publishes a separate edition for San Jose juvy. So, even if we did allow direct communication in our pages, it wouldn't reach anyone incarcerated in San Jose. Having given you the low down on that, we do thank you for your piece and hope you are soon reunited with your music and with your friends.

My Life Is A Movie

I feel that my life is a movie, because it's just like I am the main character, because they're shootin' around me and fighting. I see sexual content. This is a get paid world — everybody from my block is about they dipset (money). We stay smokin' trees, rollin' dice. It's hectic on my block.

-D-M B1

From The Beat: How does the chaos you describe on your block affect you? From reading this, it sounds like you are right in the center of the drama. What do you think your future holds if you "stay smokin' trees and rollin' dice"?

The System Lied To Me

I have a scar for the system lying to me about going home to my mom.

-D-M B1

From The Beat: In this case, who is "the system"? Who told you that you would be going home to your mom? What happened to keep that promise from being kept?

Tryin' To Maintain

My life changed when I really "hawg up"
And the scars I got, it's worse than being shot up
Right now I am locked up and thinking straight.
'Cause on the outs I'll be smok'n' grapes.
Yeah, I am from the Bay and the jungle it's what I claim
I am in the dice game try'n' to maintain
When I am off Hennessey I express the pain inside of me
And I smoke grapes so I could be stress free
It's the pain that I feel that why I be off pills
If I ain't off something I ready to kill
Jungle hawgs out here mak'n' mills

-M-O B1

From The Beat: Do you feel like killing someone right now? We ask that because you say if you aren't doing drugs you're ready to kill, but in here you aren't doing drugs, so how do you maintain? Could it be that some of those "reasons" are just excuses to go on using? How does Hennessey help you "express the pain inside" you? It seems to us that you have no difficulty in expressing that pain even now, with a clear head. Finally, when you say that "Jungle hawgs" out there making mills, we have to point out the very obvious: You're not out there making anything at all. You're in here being told when to talk, when to pee, when to eat, when to sleep, what to wear, etc., etc. That's the reality all those drugs and alcohol keep you from seeing clearly. Now's the time to make some changes, or else you can expect more of the same from the system.

Don't Know How To Control Myself

I don't now how to control myself, because I just lost someone that I really love and I am in here, locked up. I'm not gonna be able to see her get buried in the ground. I can't control what I do.

I am in the game and I am smoking crys', and I can't stop. I don't know what to do. I need help. I am giving my mom stress. I can't help it.

But when I get out of here, I know I am going back to the same spot. I seen my brother going through a lot of stuff, when I am doing the same shhh, and my mom don't like it. I need help. Please, God, help me.

-Lil' Sneaky B1

From The Beat: Yes, you do need help, Lil' Sneaky, and it's good that you recognize that. But how will you get it. You say you don't know how to control yourself, but if that someone you lost could come back for five minutes and asked you to control yourself, could you do it? Do you want to stop doing meth? We sure hope so, because we have friends who thought they were doing cool now doing long stretches in prison behind crystal. Unless you want to change, you won't, but if you do, you might want to write to a good San Francisco drug program called Delancey Street Foundation, 600 Embarcadero St., San Francisco, CA. 94107. You have to commit yourself to giving up the drug before they'll consider you, though, so have you made that commitment? If The Beat can help, ask!

My Life Has Just Begun

Gangbangin' is what I do and I ain't goin' to stop reppin/ my block. Be at the block, getting my money. This is my life and it's just begun.

-Jovanny LCRS

From The Beat: Boring! Can you guess how many guys in juvy and out of juvy could write this exact piece you've written? What else do you do that nobody else does? What do you care about? Are you going to follow all those other guys who hustle in the 'hood, get busted, go to juvy, the Ranch YA or prison? If not, how are you going to direct your life so it will be unique, different from all the others lives in the streets? Try school!

Going Back

When I go home, I expect to change my life and make a difference from the last time I got out this place, and not come back, and that will be the start of my new life and my new world.

-Cameron, LCRS

From The Beat: Can you write The Beat more about what you hope to change about your new life on the outs? Ideally, what do you want it to be like when you're free again? What do you think may become your biggest obstacles?

I'm Back

I back in the Hall. Don't know what to do, but is good. I'm go' hold it down. Now I been in and out of the hall all of my first year as a teenager. Now I'm go' go to a group home. I hope it change my life. But when I get back to the block, I'm go' do the same.

-Lil' Hit B1

From The Beat: In what way do you hope your group home will change your life? We can't tell you what to do, Charles, but we can tell you that only a fool would expect a different result for the same behavior. So, unless you're a fool, you know that when you go back to the block to do the same you will get the same — more time locked behind thick walls, answering to strangers who tell you when to eat, sleep, go to the bathroom, talk, etc., and an all-boy world. This is not a life we would choose for ourselves because we refuse to be slaves! The choices you make today will determine the quality of your life tomorrow. Think carefully.

Is It Near

My death is near
Ain't no time to fear
The sound of 38s and 45s
Make me come out
Whose life is it going to be?
Give me all you got
Only the strong survive
I see death around the block
So I stay with my eyes open
My death is near
But ain't no time to fear

-R LCRS

From The Beat: In order to truly feel such a feeling, you must be living a pretty shady lifestyle. This is so sad. How old are you? Too young to be feeling like death is calling. How can you live a righteous life? Is is not too late? What will you do differently upon getting out?

My Tattoos

Every tattoo have a story. My story is my area code and my crew's name on my arms. I have my crew's name (that I got) when I was eleven years old, because I was in the game. I love my barrio and they love me back. I also love my family—that's why I have my abuelita's (grandmother's) name. But I believe I never can get away from my gang, because that's por vida. Be cool.

-Slow Pain LCRS

From The Beat: You know you can't represent your affiliations in The Beat, Slow Pain, so we had to cut those references. Does your affiliation ever require you to do anything you wouldn't approve of doing, if you weren't with a crew? If so, how do you handle that? Why don't you describe your tattoos and write The Beat a little history of how you acquired them and what they mean to you?

My Movie

Yes, the taxi driver from the movie "Taxi," with Queen Latifa. I forget the taxi driver's real name. The movie story is not like mine, because he is a taxi driver in the movie, and in my life, I am a student who goes to school. My friends be telling me I look like him, but I just take it like a joke.

I don't want to be like him in the movie, because I don't want to be a taxi driver, I want to be a police officer, driving a cop car. I have thought of acting and stuff like that, but if I had, I would be shy and nervous.

-Steven B1

From The Beat: We think that actor's name is Jimmy Fallon. What appeals to you about becoming a policeman? How would your experience of being arrested by the cops and taken here influence you if you become a policeman some day? What do your friends think of your choice?

Two Weeks

What it do, Beat? It's yo' boy, Neezy, and today I'm a write how I got two weeks left. I'm 'bout to touch down in two weeks, ya dig? A lot of people didn't think I could do it, but look at me now! All I can say is to everybody readin' this: make sure whatever you do, you do it 'cause you wanna do it.

-Neezy LCRS

From The Beat: Good advice. Trouble can start when someone does what someone else orders them or even asks them to do, especially when he/she knows in his/her heart that advice is wrong. By now you're off the Ranch and free! You've earned that freedom! Hopefully you stay out too!

Invisible Tattoos

I have a scar on my face because I was seen by people who don't like me. When I was seven, I was walking in the Tenderloin a long time ago, when a gang tried to catch Asian kids on the block. They caught me slipping with my sister. They tried to jack my sister for our stuff, and then they pulled a knife on me, then one of them swung his arm at me and sliced my cheek a little bit. So then me and my older sister ran up the block to my house, so my cheek won't get infected.

-Aldo B1

From The Beat: It's sad to think that we live in a city where some people prey on other people, especially those who are smaller and weaker than they are, like your sister. Do you have any suggestions to change this picture? We're sorry you had to experience this, but now what are you doing to make your family stronger? If what you do allows the system to take you from your sister and family, then how can you be of any help at all? It's time to figure out a way to live in freedom so that you can be the big brother your sister needs, and the responsible young man you want to be.

My Brother's Murder Changed My Life

My life changed when my big brother was killed. My life changed because that's when I started beefin' wit' the 'jects that took my brother away. I was barely a teen when I started doing the things that got my brother killed — running the streets with ninjas way older than me. I called them my big homies. They took me under their wing because my brother was a factor.

-Not Signed B2

From The Beat: Of course it's terrible to lose your brother to the streets at such a young age. It's a tragedy. But this is a tragedy that just keeps going on and on because of the kind of thinking represented in this piece. We wonder how much you're thinking of your mother, who brought you into the world and has sacrificed for you, when you put yourself in exactly the same danger your brother was in when he lost his life. It's a strange way to show that you love her...

Heartbroken

Yeah Beat, this piece goes out to all the women that have been hurt out there. I know you ladies think all men are dirty, but it's only some men out there. I got some questions for you beautiful ladies. Did a man hurt you so bad that you can't even talk about it, or you're too ashamed to? If yes, then you're reading the right piece, Baby!

First of all, if you did get hurt don't worry, ladies. There is gonna be that special one for you, or maybe you already found him and you just don't realize it. I know that they hurt you and all, but keep yo' head up, baby girl. Who knows? Maybe you will find someone real good or, who even knows, you might even fall in love if you already haven't.

Being hurt feels really bad. I know. I've been hurt in every relationship except for one relationship. I've cried and wanted her back. I've been there. Don't feel bad. I still wonder to this day will I ever find the right girl. Yes I will. I'm still young.

Anyway, just keep yo' head up ladies, and when you least expect it, you'll run into that special person and you go from there. Stay strong my beautiful Latina, black, white, and Chinese women. You'll find that special one.

-BJ B4

From The Beat: We guess that everybody in that world has been hurt in the name of love, but that doesn't mean that we should give up on it. Thank you for reminding us of that. Sometimes, people don't even don't even realize they've found real love when it's in their face. You are a special person, Billy, and we feel sure you will find that other special person for you. We're curious about that one relationship where you were not hurt. What happened?

End My Life

Last night was a bad night for me. I was in deep depression and I felt like the world is over. I felt like I hit rock bottom. I wasn't thinking last night, I tried to kill myself. I thought that nobody likes me and I don't belong on earth, but I was wrong.

Killing myself will send me straight on to hell. I really tried to hurt myself. I tried to hang myself. The only thing that stopped me from choking myself was staff. They came and took the sheet off of my neck. I really need to stop trying to kill myself. I tried overdosing on 50 pills, hanging myself. I even tried slicing myself to death.

I realize that killin' yourself is not a way to take care of your problems. I will not ever do that again. So that's what happened. Beat, late.

-BJ B4

From The Beat: It honestly makes us cry to read what you tried to do to yourself, Billy! We hope you know that with all your failed attempts to take yourself out, God must have a purpose for you to keep you alive! Thank God that it's not your time. You are still here with us for a reason. The world is far from being over for you. It's only the beginning to better days that will come — as long as you stay strong, and keep an open mind for the bigger picture of how wonderful life can be, in addition to all the struggles and harsh realities of life that will leave any sensitive person scared and depressed. One thing that we hope you know is that some people try to make others feel out of place and lonely for their own reasons, often because they are insecure themselves. Even though it's nice to be accepted, who wants to be accepted in jail? You are worth much more than everything that the system is made of. Nothing in life last forever, and you will be out of here and making a life for yourself. Use the time you still have in this place to prepare for the future. And don't ever do that again!

My Marks

I got scars all over my body. Some you can see, some you can't see. I got a bullet mark on my arm. I got a knife mark on my leg from playing football. A cord mark on my leg from my grandpa. I got a scar on my chest from itching. Scar on my hands from fighting a lot. Scar on my face. All of my scars, some you can see, some you can't see. I got a bite mark on my arm from my girl.

-Mookey B1

From The Beat: Could you say your life history is written in scars all over your body, Mookey? Do you also have "invisible scars", the kind you get from emotional wounds that no one can see and no one knows about if you don't tell them? Maybe some of those marks you can't see in your soul were caused by the same wounds that caused the visible scars, is that possible? What are your plans for reducing the chances of receiving any more scars?

About Cito

I am Cito and I love purple or green. It's all good. Over all, I'ma do whatever I want, but I'ma keep it positive. Cito out.

-Cito B4

From The Beat: What does it mean that you're gonna do whatever you want? Certainly, you're not describing being here where you don't even have control over your own life! If all you can write about is the purple or green, you're not using this time to prepare to live a life in freedom. Think about it ... Life is about more than smoking different color herbs.

When I Was 12

My life changed when I was 12 because I started going to hella parties. So when ninjas used to see me by myself an' play me. They say I was from a certain turf, so I started sayin' I was from there. Now I'm in this shhh hard, but it ain't cool. Every day I wish I can be able to walk into all the other turf but I can't.

-Lil' Junk B2

From the beat: When you were 12, you knew nothing. You were a child. But now you do know. You have experienced a tiny bit of the possible consequences of trying to fit in. But you are still the master of your own life; you are still able to make the decision to walk a different path. It is a shame that you can't walk wherever you want, but you can't change that (yet). All you can change is your own actions and reactions. Are you ready?

Invisible Tattoos

I was at school last year at Burden High School. I was getting on the bus and then he ran to the bus. He got off at the bottom of the hill. The sucka punched me in the eye, so that made him get locked up. I had to get six stitches.

My life changed when I got sixteen years of age I did something hecha dumb

My movie I think I am in is "Boys in the 'Hood."

-JJ B2

From The Beat: First, we combined your three pieces into one because for two of them you only wrote one sentence — plus, they all seem connected to us. As for your experience on the bus, you should take that punch and those stitches as a warning. In a lifestyle that has no rules, more danger awaits you unless you make some changes in your own life. And soon!

Group Home Fears

My life changed when I first went to my group home when I was twelve because when I got there, I was like... I felt like going crazy because I knew I was about to do a year up in this group home. An' when I got out my Momma' car an' I looked, I was thinking in my head, "I can't do this," because it looked like this was a group home full of childish an' stupid people, an' I didn't want to be there. I wanted to go home soon as I walked in, because I felt this wasn't a place for me to be in. But I had to deal wit' it.

-Jacori B1

From The Beat: Learning to deal with all kinds of things, including unpleasant and unwanted things, is part of growing up! But now it looks like you got out of the group home and messed up again! Why is that? What would help you the most to stay out of here and group homes? What did you learn in that group home that has helped you? What do you still need to learn in order to remain free?

Back To The Block

I've been here 80 plus days
And now they finna send me away
But I'ma come back one day
And I'ma hit da block and say
"I'm back, because I chose to go back,
Just like I choose to live this life"
Nobody put a gun to my head
And said "You better get in"
So I'ma ride till the end
If I do something to a foe or a friend

-Pinguino B2

From The Beat: 80 plus days hasn't taught you a thing/It's like you telling the system, "Let me feel your sting"/If you do the same as you've done in the past/Your future's at risk, how long can it last?/If you "ride till the end" how long will it be/Before you're crying again, "I want to be free!"?

Love And Basketball

I went to see the movie "Love and Basketball" because it has a lot of things that relate to me in my life. My favorite character in this movie is Omar Epps 'cause he is my favorite role model. He played me (in the movie) because he does go through the same situation to get to play basketball.

He mostly plays my life because I love basketball a lot. I physically resemble him because me and him work hard to get basketball. We go through a lot so our parents could listen to us. His character teaches me to go to school and not get into bad trouble. I am going to go to the WNBA and play for the Los Angeles Sparks. My number is going to be thirty-three forever.

-Lil' One GU

From The Beat: It's great to have such a wonderful goal in mind, and to have a movie model to teach you to go to school and stay out of trouble. Since the WNBA rules state that all players must play college ball first, have you thought about what you need to do to finish school with a good enough record so that you can go to college and achieve your dream? We know you can do it, but only if you work hard, both at home, on the court, and in the classroom.

Menace To Society

I went to court a couple of weeks ago hoping to get released on EMP, but when the judge found out it was the third robbery I got caught for, he said I was a threat to society and I would come back to court in another month after I handled my charges in San Francisco. So now I'm YGC 'cause of a bench warrant, so my PO came to get me from 150.

-Lazy B4

From The Beat: Do you think you're a threat to society? If you were the judge who had to decide what to do with a young man who had already been caught for three robberies, what would you do? What will it take for you to stay out of places like this?

My Life Changed When . . .

My life changed when I started selling rocks doing my thang. And also, when I got wrapped with my cannon, rocks and weed, I said to myself I'm not gonna put fake ninjas in my bidness 'cause people talking, snitching on the young thugs 'cause we 'bout to take over. But now we already took over.

-Art Cash B4

From The Beat: What is it you young thugs have taken over exactly, juvenile hall? 'Cause that's where you are. You're making dough all right, but it's all going into the pockets of the system, and they're grateful to you for lining their pockets while you wear some other kid's dirty drawe's.

Going Places

I'm in a place that I do not want to be, or should I say I cannot go out. Most of the time I put myself in these places. I got mad at other people, but not deep down inside. I'm feeling sad, disappointed, and not trusted.

-Smacks B4

From The Beat: Feeling sad, disappointed and not trusted are all terrible feelings, so we hope you find a way to change your reality. If you know that you mostly put yourself in these places, then you also know what you need to do — or stop doing — to keep yourself out of these places. But knowing is not the same as doing. Are you up to the "doing"?

I'm Back

Man, I'm back in here. Why I'm back in here is because I lied to the police. I didn't have no warrant so I felt mad, and I didn't even know.

-Doc B4

From The Beat: We're not sure what brought you back here. What did you lie to the police about? Are you saying that if you knew there was no warrant, you would not have lied, and then you would not have come here? If so, that was a really bad mistake...

Yeah, My Name

My name is Art Cash
I'm about dough my folkers and girls
I mean they really ain't nothing
But I gotta get my feet wet when I'm swervin' off the Henney or Bacardi.
Me and my homie, we be getting our bound game on
And the way we be doing it, it's a shame

-Art Cash B4

From The Beat: There's one thing we agree with you about 100%, and that is "it's a shame." It's a shame that you still haven't figured out that life and freedom are the two most precious gifts you could get (so far ahead of dough that they aren't even on the same scale).

RIP

Rest in peace to my ninjas... None of my ninjas was ready to go, but I'ma take it for what it's worth and I'ma live for my homies even though they gone. Life must go on. You'll always be missed and never forgotten.

-Lil' Marcus B4

From The Beat: It's so very sad to read week after week the long list of fallen young men who — sometimes because of their own choices and sometimes because of circumstances beyond their control — have died long before their time! As long as you live, so will they in your heart and mind. So respect your life!

Invisible Tattoos

My time when I remember when my cousin Sky Banga got shot and I was hurt. He wasn't my closest cousin but I remember when somebody I know got shot in the head right in front of his daughter... and it wasn't outside, it was inside of a gym with a lot of children in there.

-Quincy B4

From The Beat: Stories like this always make us sad. We're sorry about your cousin. The other shooting you described taking place inside a gym is frightening!

Looking

I'm looking for the right girl. And so far, all the girls I've been with are gold diggers or out to look for a way to look good so that she can be noticed. So from here on I'm not going to stop in till I find the right one for me.

-M Money B4

From The Beat: Maybe you should stop looking, and the "right" girl will find you. If all the girls you've been with so far are either gold diggers or all flash, then it's time to find a new circle of friends...

Scars Are Like Tattoos

When I was livin' by this street life
I stayed hyped
I stayed gone from the night to the daylight
Stayed ready to clap and fights
Always was on hypes, a'ight
I got into somethin'
Never ran from nothing
Six dudes an' just me
They got on me for a color
I wish I had my thang or my brothers
So we'll be rumblin' wit' them
And helpin' each other
I got over thirty stitches on my stomach
'Cause I didn't run from it.

-Jay B4

From The Beat: There's no question that you have skills as a poet/rapper Jay, but those skills can't help you if you're taken out — either by the system or by the bullet! Those 32 stitches could very well have meant the end of you, and then how much help would you be to anyone? Is this description of the life you live going to be the same when you walk out of the Ranch? If so, you'll be experiencing other lock-ups, each farther into the hole than the last one. We hope we're wrong. Long experience tells us we aren't...

What's Gonna Happen!

Damn! I been in the halls for about two months. I think I gotta go to the Ranch, but really might go to a grouper, you feel. I want to go to the Ranch, but I want to go to a grouper 'cause I'm gonna want to get my feet wet. I'm gonna be down for a minute, but when I touch back down, I am back to the block off probation going hella dummy.

-Art Cash B4

From The Beat: Whether you go to the Ranch or a group home, if all you can think about is going to the block and going dumb (whether on or off probation), then this experience hasn't really taught you anything. If you think that you can do what you've always done without the system responding as it always does, then you are still thinking like a child. Tell us, besides going back to the block, what else do you see yourself doing?

Scars

I have may scars on my body from many people stabbing me, but I don't kick it with those people that I know I'm going to get hurt by. But yeah, I do get into fights and shhh. But them girls, they don't bring their knives. But it's coo'. That changed my life 'cause I don't get into that many fights where it gets out of hand and someone gets stabbed.

-Inocente GU

From The Beat: When you say you don't get into "that many" fights where someone gets stabbed, how many fights like that do you think you can get into without facing serious — even deadly — consequences? Are you fighting over real things, personal things, or are you fighting with people who you know only as "enemies" (rival gang members)? If these are gang fights, then the only way out for you is to be out of the gang. If these are personal fights, then you have to find a better way to express your anger. Otherwise, you will be the one who

Grandma's Death Changed My Life

My life changed when my grandma died. I used to have everything, but now I have to do everything for myself at a young age.

-Marquez B4

From The Beat: What sort of things do you now do for yourself that she used to do for you? Do you think doing things for yourself might help you be independent as you grow up? We're sorry you lost your grandma.

Gonna Wash That Stuff Right Outta My Hair

The first thing I'ma do when I get out is take a 30-minute shower with some good-ass shampoo and good-ass conditioner and have a comb up in there with me, just combin' my shhh. Then I'm go and have sex with a pretty-ass female and have kids. Well, just one. And then I'ma start a company about helping people out and shhh. I can't tell you exactly 'cause it's kind of illegal, but the important part that it helps people, right?

It doesn't matter if a certain white man says, "No, it's illegal." Good is good and bad is bad. "Illegal" is just another way to mix the word "bad" with money. Well, having a kid will be good in my life 'cause I don't want to have a goodie two-shoe-ass life with no drama in it and my kid only knowing good without the bad. I know it will be hella hard for me, my baby mama (whoever she is) and my kid growing up like that, but I want my kid to know what it's like on both sides. Good and bad. As long as I'm there to support him, in the end it'll be worth it.

I know y'all won't understand. I just say to myself, "You jerks are just Americanized. Forget America! Money ain't shhh if you can get what you want a different way."

-Meen B5

From The Beat: Well, there's one thing about this piece that's absolutely correct: We don't understand. You have made this into an "us vs them" (or "me" vs. "Americanized jerks"), but since you won't, or can't share your vision, whether legal or not, we have no way to comment — except to say this. You may not care whether someone declares something you do illegal or not, but that is not a defense in court (the system doesn't care if you care or not). So, while you think you can "get away with" doing something "good" but illegal, our older eyes see something far more dangerous — especially for that yet-to-be-born child of yours who has absolutely no say in the kind of life you provide him or her. When you're feeling like talking about your plan, then maybe we can understand what you're talking about for a more meaningful response.

Torcido (Lock-Up)

W'at it do Beat? Bueno primeramente saludos a todos los homies doin' tiempo. (Best wishes to all the homies doin' time…)

Well today I wanna write about my life on the inside. I came in here with three bullets or three strikes as most people call it. I've been locked up for about two months, and of course you know I'm fighting my case to the heart. I can't go out like that.

I also came in here with seven gunshot wounds. I guess it's all part of this crazy vida I'm living, que no? Gang banging, putting in work for that barrio, we down to die for. Some people say I deserved it, but forget all of them 'cause they don't know me in the outs. They don't know w'at I've done, or w'at I've been through, que no?

Well, my public pretender says that since I'm a juvenile my max time is 28 years and that the judge might give me two strikes instead of three. And the DA is tryin' to give me deals with no less than 20 years so you know my answer is, HELL NO! But regardless I keep my composure.

Well keep trucha y al rato.

-Goofy B5

From The Beat: Whether you're down to die or not, you're gonna die. In fact, that's life's plan for all of us, so why "correct" nature by speeding up the process? A "deal" that requires a minimum 20 years is hella harsh, but the problem is that jury trials have very unpredictable outcomes. If you fight it, we hope you get a sympathetic jury and a PD willing to fight for you. At the same time, we wish you would examine your life more closely to recognize your own importance as an individual, a unique creation, not merely an unimportant part of a larger and more important "cause." To us, there is no more important cause than that of personal freedom and growth. Good luck.

Goin' Bad At The Ranch

W'at it do, Beat? This that vato Cartoon from San Pancho. Just chillin' doin' my tiempo like a gangster. All them chavalas left and went to the Ranch. They think it's all good, but I'm goin' to the Ranch in two weeks. And when I get there, Cartoon gonna go bad like a tycoon, yadimean!

Other than that, I'm chillin' wit' homies and keeping my composure, doin' w'at I gotta do. Well, a'right then, vatos. I gotta cut it short. So one love homies. Alrato.

-Cartoon B5

From The Beat: Well, we're not sure what you mean when you say you're gonna go bad at the Ranch. We hope you're not announcing to the system that they should keep a special eye on you. We also hope you start thinking ahead to the consequences of your own decisions and choices because things that don't worry you now have a way of coming back to bite you on the ass later on!

Hi To All My Inmates

I just wanna say hi to all my inmates. I know you people want to get out, but it's ok because you won't be in here for long. So just be strong.

-Jerrell GU

From The Beat: We took out all your turf references, your block references, and your silly gay references, and this is what's left. You know, getting out is very, very easy. You'll do it. But staying out, now that's a different matter. The main focus of this piece (most of which we had to remove) tells us that the plans you are making will bring you right back here! We wish you could learn from the experience of others, but sadly, it appears you're only going to learn the hard way…

Tattoos

I have tattoos because they all mean something to me. And they have a meaning, 'cause I would have not got them. The meaning is because someone have died, or I have them just to have them. I got a scar on my head from getting in a fight with my brah and he dipped me on a car. From that fight I had to go to get stitches in my head.

-D-Sha B5

From The Beat: Was your brother scared when he saw that your head was bleeding? Did it affect the relationship you have with him? Are all your tattoos the names of people, or do you also have pictures? Where? What?

Wish

I just wish sometimes I think about what I do, because now I am up in here wishing to pop one are two. How about you?

I just want to go home. Why did I do something so wrong? I just wish I did the lean back and just look. But now I did what I did and look where it got me. I just don't feel what is so real.

I wish I just can stop now and turn around, but now it is too late because I did what I did. And now I am back doing this weak-ass lean back up in this box, looking at this holey sock and this little-ass box.

-Young Hitta GU

From The Beat: Yes, it's too late to change the consequences of your own decisions this time, but it's not too late to change your future consequences. Have you had a chance to think about "what you do" while you've been locked up? If so, have you learned anything about yourself that might make it easier for you to stay out of here? If not, why not? If so, what? Are you willing to change so that you don't have to come back to this little box?

My First Tat

I have a tattoo that I got for free for helping someone in a fight. It was one of my ninjas from Richmond. We got into it wit' some drunk Latinos. It was supposed to be a one-on-one, but they jumped in so I had to jump in and help my ninja. We were droppin' them for a min till hella of them started comin' out wit' crowbars and Corona bottles and shhh.

Three of them got on me. I got hit wit' a Corona bottle on da side.Then that's when they gave me the bizz. I got hit in my head wit' the crowbar, then I dropped. While I was on the flo' gettin' smashed, my ninja was getting stomped. Then they ran when we got up. That's when I got my tattoo. I bled a lot. I had to get eight staples in my head. It was real close to my temple, so when I go to the barber shop, they ask me if I want a part. I go, "No thanks. I already got one for free…"

This is Dave sayin' be safe when getting' a tattoo.

-Dave B5

From The Beat: Were you jumped for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, for being in a different set, for being in the wrong turf, for being the "wrong" race — or for no reason at all? You had a very close call, Dave. It could have ended with you no longer in this world, or permanently brain damaged and unable to care for yourself. So we're wondering if it made you

I Did Wrong

I was doing hella cool and just like that, Moms played me. Called 5-0 on me two days before I was just about to get off probation. Now they gonna wash me. I already know, but I was doing wrong on the under, and just like they say, "What goes around comes around."

That's why I'm not tryna trip that hard because all it's going to do is stress me out. I did wrong, so now it's all coming back on me. so now I just got to take it like a man.

-No Name B2

From The Beat: Well, we don't know what taking it like a man means, exactly (everyone "takes it" in their own way), but however you do it, you have to take it. But that's not all you have to do; if you really want to be cool, you have to change. What we want to know is, how could your Moms call the 5-0 on you if you were doing "hella cool," like you said? Stop giving your mom reason to turn you in, and then you'll truly be doing hella cool. And next time, put your name on what you write.

We In Jail

We in jail
Wearin' other girls' underwear
Stains on the panties
Food taste like ash
We might as well be eatin' trash
Bleached-ass purple T's
Socks wit' holes in the toe
Mismatched slippers
Sharing rooms wit' girls in a little box
Knock to go to the bathroom —
If they don't come you have to pee in the sheets
Life ain't funny in B3
But next time I won't get caught slippin'

-Rhonda & Debbie GU

From The Beat: So after tasting the bitterness of jail, your only answer is to not get "caught slippin'" anymore? Sadly, we have far too many friends who made the same promise to themselves… now doing long prison terms! Only a fool would believe that she could do the same stuff without facing the same consequences. Are you fools?

My Movie

It was this one movie that reminded me of myself and my friends. The movie was called "Blue Hill Avenue." This movie was about these four kids who was about fifteen and they all started off by selling weed. They was committed to it 24-7, kind of like me and my friends how we be on the block and how they had each other's back they trusted each other. That's why I said this movie reminds me of me and my friends. It describe us exactly like how the movie is from beginning to end.

-Tabari B2

From The Beat: So how was it to be looking at your picture from the outside looking in? We're curious about the ending of this movie. Does it end happily? Will you end happily? Was there anything about this movie's characters that made you want to tell them to change? Is there anything about the character you are that you would like to change?

Tatttoos

Yeah, what's up Beat? This ya boy, Al-Bundy, comin' live to you from that B5 maximum security. Yeah, they tryin' wash ya boy.

Anyways, let me tell y'all about some of the tattoos I got. Yeah, I'm tatted up, but first let me tell y'all about the one on the neck. It says mom's name. You already know ain't no other bezzy name about to be on me, but yeah, it's mom's name. And the reason why I got that is because if you love someone as much I do, you will kill somebody over moms.

The next one I got is on the arm that says "Rest In Peace" with a face on it, with some dice and some other shhhh. And the other arm got ma young ninja, Wag-nutz, may he rest in peace. But yeah, he got killed by some young punk where I lived, He was in the wrong place at the wrong time, but I love bra, and I gotta get that fat-ass tat of my bra Marc on the arm with that fat cross. But I see y'all when the next Beat slide through. I'm out.

-Al-Bundy B5

From The Beat: Well, you still have a lot of body left to paint on… Will you continue tatting up? We appreciate just how much you love your mom, but what good would you be to her if you had to kill someone over her? We know you're hurting now to be away from her, but imagine just how much pain you would leave her with if they took you away from her forever!

Waitin' To Hear The Bell Of Freedom

My life change when choose to
But right now I gotta pay the consequences
For the things I do
Inside a cell
That's trapped in hell
Waitin' for my time
To come hear that bell
The system is like an unbreakin' spell
My life gonna change
When my mind gets well
My mind's corrupted by evil
And that's why I sin
Playin' this game to win
'Cause this the life I'm in
Feelin' all this pain
Is just makin' me insane
'Cause all this stuff
Just goin' through my brain
An' I'm tellin' you
I ain't never gettin' out this hell
This hell on earth
That was meant to test us
An' the only way out
Is six feet deep

-Ngo LCRS

From The Beat: What is going through your mind right now? What's causing your pain? Dig deep inside! Is being down at the Ranch giving you some needed time to chill and think about your situation, your alternatives for the future, or is it just adding to your misery, confusion? How is being at the Ranch testing you? How do you think you're doing responding to that challenge?

Arrested For The First Time

My life changed when I got arrested for the first time. It was on May 2, 2006. Man, I never thought I would see myself in here. I've never seen my parents cry. I've always been disrespectful to my parents, and now I realize that I want to be with them. I never hugged my mom before, and when I came into the hall, she's been giving me hugs. I never thought they cared, but now I realize that they care about me. I was never at home, but now I want to be home!

I've never been so stressed in my life. After I get out of here, I'm willing to go to school, stop doing drugs, and respect my parents. Juvenile Hall got me thinking about how I'm living, and now I want to change my life around. I want to succeed in life!

-Sara GU

From The Beat: It's a pity that it takes losing your freedom to realize just how important family can be. Now that you recognize just how much love there is for you from them, and how many sacrifices they've made for you, we wonder what you plan to sacrifice for them. These are positive words, and we hope you have the will and determination to see them come to reality.

Out

I have a month left inside the Ranch, for all you people who went to know, feel me? After a long time, I'm finally out. Am feelin' myself, so am about to do it big, my way. Off top. Only thing on my mind is get money and get females. That's what I am here for, so, hey, might as well do what I do. Only thing life promises is death. So get and step your game up, way up.

-Birdman LCRS

From The Beat: Birdman, we suppose you deserve your freedom, so congratulations on getting out! But you sure as hell don't deserve it if all you are going to do is get it taken away again. We hope you do it legit, forget this "mafia style" shhh! Wake up and handle your business in a way that makes one (your mom?) proud of you.

My Life Changed

My life changed when I entered high school. Once I entered high school, I started to hang out with a crowd of people that's in a gang or people that are just down for a color. I hang out with them a lot because they're cool to kick it with and it's always hella fun.

Ever since I entered high school I just have been fighting a lot and started to drink alcohol more. Now since I'm locked up in YGC it makes me think and realize I should change. I should stop fighting, drinking and I should go to school more and improve my grades.

-Lina GU

From The Beat: We're sorry you had to come to a place like this to realize what you have been risking by fighting and drinking and hanging with a crowd that may be fun, but which threatens your future. We hope you deal very directly with your relationship with alcohol, because it's our experience that alcohol is the easiest and quickest drug to get addicted to (without ever realizing that is what's happening). Getting drunk only makes every other problem you face that much harder to deal with. So, we hope you seriously stick to your words, focus on school, and have safe fun only after you've done your homework. If you stay focused, you won't ever have to come here (or worse) again!

Permanent Scars

All these feelings that I feel trying to figure out reality. I'm trapped in this tunnel with no way out. Everything and everybody that meant so much to me left me feeling abandoned, alone and sad.

What hurts the most is that the love of my life played me and left me with scars that can't be healed till this day. But through it all, it feels good to know that I still got myself even when God or nobody else can give me no answers. But I'm happy just setting my future out and making better decisions from here on out, regardless of these permanent scars.

-Gia GU

From The Beat: Probably all of us carry some scars of lost love, but we're sorry you've felt abandoned by so many. You say that God is not giving you answers, but maybe being here is a partial answer — a way of saying it's time to take stock of your life, see what you need to change, and go forward. That's what it sounds like you are doing with your time here, so we believe your future is going to be much better than your past.

I've never been so stressed in my life. After I get out of here, I'm willing to go to school, stop doing drugs, and respect my parents.

I Get All The Girls

You know me, the Weather Man. Get all the girls, so keep your girl close.

-Weather Man LCRS

From The Beat: If you're so fine that you get all the girls, what do you need/want with anyone else's? We don't know you. To what do you attribute your charm? What are your secrets of attraction? What makes you so special?

Tryin' To Get It At The Movies

Wow. There I am in the movie. Yeah, I see movies all the time. I've seen "Get Rich Or Die Tryin'", and that reminded me of my life and the life style I live. Not all the way the same, but some parts favor me and my young homies trying to get it... Whatever for the dough.

–Art Cash B4

From The Beat: What parts of the movie were like your life and what parts weren't? We love movies too. What's the best movie you've ever seen?

There I Am In The Movies

Living in the ghetto
Life in the ghetto
Is a hard livin' because
When you in the game
You don't get out
You can't take the ghetto out of me
Because that where
You always going to be from
To all, the love one, I out

-Shelly Mac GU

From The Beat: We don't understand the title of your poem. Is there one movie that you think describes your life? The world is a very big place, and the ghetto is a very small place. We hope you experience a little of that bigger world before you decide that the ghetto is what defines you. Does being in juvenile hall also define ghetto life for you? Will it change anything about how you live your life? Will you give up anything on the outs in order to stay on the outs, or do you think you can go back to the same life without facing the same consequences?

Hope To Change

I got here on April 7th
I've got court on June 9th
I think that's a damn hype
63 days sober
It's hard 'cause I'm a heavy smoka
That's the only reason why I'm in here
I always be in my room cell praying to God —
sometimes even share some tears
Dis is my second time in here
I hope when I get out I change

-Edwin B2

From the beat: Good news! You don't have to wait until you get out to change. Now that you have some time to yourself (and you've been sober for more than two months!), use it as time to start changing little by little. Hoping to change is not enough. You must make a decision to change... and then follow through. Change won't happen over night, so take it one step at a time.

I'm Out

What 's'up Beat? I'm 'bout to leave this hole. I'm 'bout to go to a group home. I'ma be out, so I'll holla at ya from the grouper. This is young Enano and I'm out.

-Enano B4

From The Beat: Congratulations on getting out of here. We hope you write us from the group home and spit some knowledge about what it's like, the good and the bad. Thanks for writing each week, and good luck.

Baby Boy

Baby boy, you stay on my mind you so dam fine,
I think about you day and night, and I'm wondering why…
Damn! You got me goin' crazy 'cause I'm not with you. Instead I'm here in YGC doin' time. Been here for 33 days and I'm going crazy baby
'Cause I'm not there with you by yo' side like I used to be…
Every time I'm thinking of you it make's me cry
'Cause I know I know you the one for me. I always ask myself why —
Why didn't I say yes when you asked me out? Instead I waited till I got locked up
And now it got me thinking so much…
I'm wanting you so damn bad, wishin' you was there
Don't worry baby boy, I'm coming home soon
And the day I see you will be the happiest day of my life. I might even cry…
Lovin' you since day one…
Can you tell me why I'm wanting you 'cause I'm getting so confused…
Why you have to like me now? You got me thinkin' and wanting you
Damn, boy! I remember yo' sexy face, cute smile,
Yo' vision will always stay in my mind
Don't worry baby, I won't hurt you like yo' ex-girl did
OK, love always.

-Lil' Shadow GU

From The Beat: You're obsessed with love, Lil' Shadow, a true romantic soul. But we also want to know more about the other aspects of your life, because you are an intelligent young woman with a long future ahead of her. If there were no "Baby Boy" in the picture, where would your head be? Where do you want your life headed? What is your plan for the future? What are you willing to sacrifice to stay out of places like this? Unless you're willing to make those changes, you'll be writing sad poems of lost love from behind other walls…

Thank You

I'm leaving on May 25th, so I just wanna say thank you to The Beat for letting me write my thoughts.

-Pinguino B2

From The Beat: We want to thank you for putting it down week after week. We wish you all the luck, Pinguino. If you're down for your set, as you say, you're going to need all the luck you can get.

Would've, Should've, Could've

I've been waiting for my eighteenth birthday and now I wish I was ten again. Knowin' the things I know now, I would've change my whole lil' style.

-D-Grinda B4

From The Beat: What, exactly, would you have changed if you knew then what you know now? And since you do know what you know now, what's preventing you from making those changes?

My Last Beat

I know y'all like what "ya" man doin'. They gonna send me to Solano County. Is that some BS or what? But I got to fight 'cause, Mama, I ain't happy here. So I would like to thank Thomason, Guerrero, Semien — and I did not forget about you Uncle No-Neck Satch.

So I be a hundred miles away when you get this letter. So ya know I be Young Fabe, or y'all can just call me Tha Problem 'cause you take more shots in yo' face like Madonna. And you will get eat 'cause I'm like Dahmer ninja. So wish me luck. When y'all see me on the outs, y'all gonna be like, "Oh Boy!"

I don't want to leave but I gotta go right now. I be back right before u know it.

-The Problem B5

From The Beat: Well, we'll miss you in our workshops, Young Fabe. We don't like calling you Tha Problem because we haven't seen the problem side of you… And just because you're no longer at YGC does not mean this must be your last contribution to The Beat. You can always write us from wherever you are and whatever you're doing — and we'd love to hear what that is. (We're not sure what you mean when you compare yourself to Dahmer… He liked to have sex with young Asian boys before killing, cooking and eating them… He was murdered in prison… So what about him reminds you of yourself?)

Trust No One

Sometimes you got to give him some time and let him think
Sometimes you gotta give the shot and let him stink
You can't bring every horse to the pan and let him drink
I rather leave my eye open instead of blink
'Cause soon ya eyes shut, them ninjas will rise up
Then some ninja that be getting you tied up
I gotta die but
I ain't ready to leave
So over it, it's petty. I be ready to squeeze

-Lil' Marcus B4

From The Beat: This is a tight poem, even though we don't agree with the title that you can' trust anyone. We think the trick is to figure out who you can trust, because going through life with one eye open can make a person very, very tired!

When I First Stepped Into YGC

My life changed when I first stepped into YGC. Every day I'll walk around in my room, wondering how's the outside going to be. I would look out that small window to see how the sky looks like to me. Every night I would wake up to see if this was all just a dream. But it wasn't. This is reality.

-Tiffany GU

From The Beat: Yes, this is today's reality, Tiffany, but that doesn't mean it defines reality for all time. How has this reality changed you? Will it change how you handle yourself on the outs? In what ways?

Being Faithful

What's up, Beat? I just wanna talk about being faithful. At first it was kinda hard for me to be because I'm used to havin' like five girls. But after I met this girl Donesha, I decided to be faithful because I don't wanna do her wrong.

I been gone for like a year now, no home passes or nothing. I ran last week, came back to see her, and she said she ain't been messin' around. I believe her too, because for her to take me back after a year must mean something, right? At first I said I would never fall in love with a girl, but guess what? I'm in love and I'm really wantin' to take the time I need to take to make this perfect.

I wanna know what I should do to make this work out, but I need some advice from The Beat because I ain't used to this lovey dovey shhh.

-Baby Grimey B4

From The Beat: Isn't it interesting how things we believed would never affect our lives can change everything? What can you tell us about Donesha that makes her different from all the other girls you've been with? We have all had our ups and downs with love, so we don't really feel qualified to advise you. But we can say that the first responsibility you have to anyone you love is to them and not to the streets or the lifestyle choices that have brought you to the halls. Love requires sacrifices. No person in a relationship can have everything his or her way, there must be give and take. If you figure out how to give up the things that allow the system to take you from her — and you make the necessary sacrifices — you will be demonstrating your love more than any words you can say. (By the way, what are the consequences for having run… and are they worth it?)

Dear Beat Within

Some of the things that made me feel sad from The Beat Within is when you leave those mean comments. I have been sittin' here expressin' my feelings on the paper and stuff, but then all y'all do is sit there and hurt my feelings. For example, when we was writing about — I forgot the topic — but anyway you called me a brat.

You guys should be careful what you guys say because these are people's feelings that they're writing down and sharing with you guys, and when you respond this way, it really does hurt people's feelings because that's what they think, and it's like y'all crushin' it. I first had loved The Beat Within until y'all had said that to me. Also I didn't even want to write no more when y'all had said that. But I had to because I had to get something out. But anyway, that's enough.

-Rina

From The Beat: We're truly sorry we hurt your feelings, Rina. Maybe we responded to this group in the same way we respond to young people who are locked up because we don't want to see them doing things that get them into more trouble. And maybe we should have been a little more gentle because of your age. However, The Beat does like to keep it real, so when we wrote that you were a brat, it was in response to something specific that you had written. That means that — even though we take your criticism seriously and will try to express ourselves in the future so you don't feel crushed — we still hope you will look carefully at yourself and your own words, and treat our response as a word to the wise. Such words can hurt in the short run, but if you think carefully about them, they can help in the long run. We've enjoyed having you in our workshops and appreciate your contributions. Thank you.

Lessons From Street Soldiers

I've learned many things in Street Soldiers. I learned that no one can take away your respect. This has changed many things in my life. If someone is trying to disrespect me it won't work because respect comes from within. It won't work because I have respect for myself. I am challenged by this every day by friends and people. They try to get me in trouble and they do, but I don't care because I didn't do anything wrong. I just let them do what they want.

-Mucho Caliente

From The Beat: We have really enjoyed joking with you, Sr. Caliente... We thank you not only for making us laugh, but also for your contributions to the discussions and the writing. We are proud of you for not letting friends pull you away from what you have learned here. We hope you don't get too hot this summer, or you'll burn yourself up...

My Upcoming Vacation

For my summer vacation I'm going to Washington D.C. with a few of my classmates. In D.C. we are going to go sight seeing to learn about things we haven't learned about in school. When we get there we're going to see the Holocaust Museum.

After we come back from Washington, I'm supposed to go to a program at Eastside, but my mom is going to call them and tell them I'm not going to be able to make it. Then I'm going to go to Oregon to go to this camp. Afterwards, I'm just going to go home and chill. I might just go to Camp May Mac. I'm just going to go to the 6-week program if I make it back in time!

-Princess

From The Beat: It sounds like you have a very full summer ahead of you. We would be most interested to read your impressions of Washington D.C. in general, and the Holocaust Museum in particular. You can always write and we'll put your piece in the back of The Beat. (Our address is in every issue of The Beat at the bottom of page 3.)

Being A Street Soldier

Being in Street Soldiers has changed my outlook in life. It has changed the way I view myself and others. It has really changed the way I treat others and how I look at myself.

A poem in Street Soldiers about being sexually abused really spoke to me. I love Street Soldiers and this is a great opportunity for me. I hope I get this opportunity again. So yeah, I'll keep on writing to you.

-Forgot To Sign

From The Beat: We hope you do keep writing to us, because we'd like to know how Street Soldiers has changed your outlook on life and the way you view yourself and others. Do you feel better about yourself for

My Plans

Things I will do in my summer vacation: play soccer, study for next year in high school and stay home. I learned about a lot of things in this class because my life changed.

-Renzo

From The Beat: How did you life change, Renzo? What will you do this summer to prepare for high school? Thank you for all your writing in The Beat. We've enjoyed it.

Street Soldiers

Me being a Street Soldier is something that I never had before in my life before I took the class. It has taught me how to think about things, to really know what's going on in this world. I think this class is a good class because people really need to know all of this information because I know there are some people who don't know all the things they taught me in Street Soldiers. So I want to say that I am so glad that they have this class so people can know more things about their world and the life we live. One of the examples, my teachers brought some friends in to tell us how they learned the hard way. Now I know what to do so I don't have to learn the hard way.

-Ernesto

From The Beat: We know it will make your Street Soldier teachers very happy to read that their program taught you what to do, so that you don't have to learn those lessons the hard way. Not only that, Ernesto, but now you can teach those lessons to the younger kids you know who need positive leadership lessons. Thank you for writing in The Beat, and we hope you have a wonderful summer.

Street Soldiers Is Fun

Street Soldiers was fun. I hope to do it again. I wouldn't change The Beat Within because it's cool, but rather Street Soldiers. Street Soldiers was fun, but could use more activities. I hope that I get stories to share with others about Street Soldiers, so keep up the good work. P.S. I might keep on mailing to S.S.

-Wizzy

From The Beat: Are you sure you will keep on mailing to SS? We hope you meant that you would keep on mailing to us (TBW), because we'd love to know how you are doing, and what progress you are making in your life.

Summer Soccer

I will spend my summer vacation playing soccer with my soccer team and trying to win the league where we are because we are in first place.

The thing I learned in this class is to respect people more, say no to drugs, and a lot of good things.

-Victor

From The Beat: Yes, those are good things to learn. The whole world has been watching soccer this week. Which team are you hoping to win? How are they doing?

Thanks SS And BW

Dear Beat Within,

I love this and I hope that I get this again. This class has taught me that I'm not the only one with problems, like being abused, and not just physically. I've been abused sexually and other ways.

-In Pain

From The Beat: We are very unhappy to read that you've been abused sexually, and it makes us understand your Beat name much better. Whoever did this to you violated a very basic relationship that should exist between adults and children, and that person needs help even more than you do! But we do hope that you find someone you trust to talk about this (if you haven't already), because if you don't, holding it all in can be like a slow-acting poison on your soul. Thank you for being so faithful to The Beat's weekly writing. Good luck.

Street Soldiers

Street Soldiers has been a positive impact in my life. This program has helped me understand that decisions are important, and you should think before you make every decision. It's fascinating because I never put things in perspective like I do now before learning these rules for living.

Being a Street Soldier to me is something to be proud about. It's a part of me that makes me feel unique and special. Now that I know all this information I can easily point out the fearships in my life. Now that I know this mentally and physically, I am alive and free.

-Talena

From The Beat: Well, there's nothing better than to be alive and free, so congratulations! Will your Street Soldier experience help you as you enter high school? Does it help you in your daily life?

My Thoughts

Street Soldiers
I think being a Street Soldier is being a leader, being respectful and being a friend and a person who follows all the rules of living. I believe in what I'm saying because being a Street Soldier has changed my attitude toward people and school in a good way. By being a Street Soldier, in my future I will be able to give back life-giving information to kids like me.

Beat Within
The Beat Within has inspired me to become a poet because when The Beat comes I can just write about anything and it will be good. I really like The Beat Within. I wish they could come to my high school. Thank you to The Beat Within.

Summer Vacation
Over my summer vacation I will be gong to Younglife Camp. And then when we get back, I will have a job working with my aunt at her day care. Also I will be attending a summer program and I will still be running track.

-Tyrica

From The Beat: We think you have a lot going for you, Tyrica, including your very positive and upbeat outlook which is reflected in everything you write. We have been more than impressed with your poetry. You have a poetic way of expressing yourself, so you don't have to be inspired "to become a poet" — you are already a poet! Thank you for your kind words about The Beat. Just keep moving forward. We expect great things from you.

Street Soldier

Street Soldiers has taught me to control myself because I could've got into so many fights and cussed out so many people. But Street Soldiers and my friends helped me control my temper because everyone knows I have one. When you push it you betta run. Street Soldiers has taught me how to do a lot of stuff. They taught me how to respect myself, and respect others. They taught me how to help myself and be careful who you trust.

-Miss EPA

From The Beat: Will what you've learned in Street Soldiers also help you as you go through school and live in your community? What techniques do you use to control your temper when you feel like going off on someone? Thank you for writing for us during our workshops.

Real Meaning

For me, Street Soldiers and The Beat Within means more than just a class where you're wasting your time, waiting for the bell to ring so you could finally go home. No, for me, Street Soldiers is a privilege to learn more than Math, English or Science. It teaches me what is good or bad, the consequences of doing bad actions and the right thing to do in certain situations.

-Ovier

From The Beat: We're really glad that Street Soldiers has been so meaningful in your school life, Ovier. Of course, it's our belief that you were already well-versed on right and wrong, and doing many of the things that Street Soldiers is all about. We see in you the potential to be a teacher, a leader, a positive community influence. Just keep doing what you're doing — and thank you for doing it!

Upcoming Vacation

Well, I am goin' to tell you about my upcoming summer vacation. I'm going to LA and go paint ball shooting. I'm going with my bro and my cousin, and some friends. We are going to have a fun time over there. I like to go paint ball shooting. It is so fun to shoot different people who you don't know.

One other thing. We are going to Mexico and going to the beach. We have a great time at the beach we go to there. We try new things when we go there. That's what we are going to do in my upcoming summer.

-Oscar

From The Beat: Your summer sounds like a lot of fun to us. Why do you go to LA to go paint ball shooting? Do you have family there? Are there places closer to home that you also can go paint ball shooting? Where do you travel in Mexico? What new things do you try when you're there?

He Lied To Me

In The Beat I wrote a piece that said "feeling cold, Wizzy?" That was before, because that person was lying to me. He never liked me. I know that because he's always touching girls' behinds, and before he said that he loved me.

I don't know what to do because he says he loves me and it ain't true 'cause when I asked him over the phone if he loved me and wanted me in his life he said he had to go. I told him to call me and he never did.

While I'm writing this I feel hecka angry. I can't concentrate. We never wanted anyone knowing, but he lied. He lied to me and I trusted him. I thought I could trust him. He makes me do things that I don't want to, like talk to my other friends. He doesn't have me doing any bad things, but still. So yeah. I need help.

-Wizzy

From The Beat: We don't think you need help, Wizzy. We think you know what to do, only you don't want to do it. We think this boy wants everything to go his way. He doesn't want to be faithful to you (or anyone else), but he's too much of a child to be honest with you. Generally, girls mature faster than boys, and it sounds like you are much more mature than he is — which is not the best condition for a positive relationship. Our advice to you is to treat this boy as a friend but not a boyfriend, as someone you like but not as someone you love. Give yourself a year or so for the boys to catch up before you start thinking seriously about love. That's our advice... We have enjoyed everything you've written for us, and your very active participation in The Beat. Thank you,

My Upcoming Summer

My upcoming summer I plan to go to Vegas my first week out of school. Then my second week I plan to go to my uncle's house to train for football. I think I'm going to do that for the rest of the summer and if not just be solo up here in da Bay.

-Anthony

From The Beat: Who did you go to Vegas with? Did you have a good time? We bet it was ht there. Where does your uncle live? What do you do to train for football? What position would you like to play?

Being A Street Soldier

To me being in Street Soldiers has been a heck of a good experience and has let me get more contacted with myself. I'm a strong person and being a Street Soldier made me stronger. It also made me realize that some of the things I've done aren't things I want to do forever. Being a Street Soldier has made me feel better about myself. Thank you S.S.!

-Aylet

From The Beat: This is a very nice tribute to Street Soldiers, Aylet. What kinds of things did you learn you don't want to be doing forever? If a Street Soldiers program were in every junior and senior high school, do you think it would have an effect on the community?

Street Soldiers

What does Street Soldiers mean to you? What does the Street Soldier's goal mean to you? Be alive, free, positive, and productive. To me it means to be a leader, not a follower. It means you do your own thing and not do somethin' you would regret.

But what if the street transfers you into a different person? So what's goin' to be your new goal? Sex, drugs, violence! Think, then make yo' next decision.

-Royalty

From The Beat: Even though we wish you had been a little more serious about the subjects you wrote about for us, we've thoroughly enjoyed having you in our workshops! We know that behind that active mouth of yours is an active brain and a good heart, and those are characteristics that should take you far in this world. Remember your own words not to be a follower, and enjoy your summer!

A Guy Break

In summer I am planning to take a guy break. Don't want to really do anything. Just chill with my friends. I don't really have something big planned, but hopefully I have myself a lot of fun.

-Denise

From The Beat: Summer is the time to have a lot of fun, even if you don't have any special plans. And taking a "guy break" sounds like good medicine to us! Have a wonderful summer!

My Thoughts

Street Soldiers
Street Soldiers has made no change in my life because I haven't applied it to my life. It's too hard. Yes, I'll become a better person when I become a Street Soldier. I'll stop doing the bad things that I used to do – cuss, fight, smoke, steal, lie.

Beat Within
I like the questions that we get to write by yourself, but I don't like it that we don't get to cuss. My favorite holiday was my favorite topic. I would change the fact that you could cuss and talk about people if I were running a workshop.

Summer Vacation
I'll be working with my dad painting and building stuff this summer. I like doing this and I've done it every summer.

-Jay Jay

From The Beat: We're sorry you felt limited by not being able to cuss in The Beat, Jay Jay. One reason for that is that we are guests, and have to respect our school (or juvenile hall) hosts. Another is that we want you to be able to express yourself in many different ways, and not be limited to just a few "bad" words. Finally, we congratulate you for working this summer with your dad. That's great training for your future. Be careful, Jay Jay, not to keep doing those things that could lead you into danger. Don't wait until you make one mistake and find that it's too late to apply the important lessons that Street Soldiers teaches...

Good-bye

I hope my summer vacation will be fun and miraculous. I hope I have so much fun. I hope I go over friends' homes and chill and be who I am, just be me and enjoy my summer vacation.

Good-bye Beat, farewell the poetry from all as well
Good-bye to all the words of knowledge that I have read
Good-bye Beat, just remember my words of poetry and beauty
Good-bye Beat, farewell because Midnight is going to high school
Heck Yeah!

-Midnight

From The Beat: Heck yeah, is right! We expect great things from you, Midnight, because you have already shown us that you can be a great writer. We also hope that you have a very fine summer vacation, and that you're all rested for the high school career that lies ahead of you.

Summer 2006

During this summer I hope to accomplish a lot in working on myself and my character. I hope that I will have a good time in all the events that will happen during the summer. My goal is to read at least three books and watch at least 20 movies! I'm proud of myself that I am able to walk at my graduation because I could have missed those memories that would last forever.

-Talena

From The Beat: We're proud of you too! What kind of books do you like reading? What kinds of movies do you like seeing? We hope you accomplish all your summer goals, and that next year is an exciting and wonderful one for you.

The Beat Within

Dang! Where can I start? The Beat Within has been an eye-opening experience. It's made me think twice about going to jail. Plus I also got to see Will. Will, now he's cute! Well, anyways, thank y'all!

-Aylet

From The Beat: Will? Yeah, he all right... (Nah. We're teasing. We know how fine he is, and the best thing about Will is that he's even finer on the inside than on the outside!) We hope The Beat has given you things to think about (besides Will), and that you will be able to pass on some of those lessons to those coming up behind you. Thanks for being such a good writer in The Beat.

The Beat

I like some of The Beat's writing. I like it because they write what they have in them. I like it better to have discussions than to write because I like to hear about other people.

-Javier

From The Beat: Some people like to talk during the discussion, but others only like to write. We hope you have some fun this summer so you are fresh when school starts again.

For Tha Summer

As soon as Saturday comes and I get my graduation paper I am going to be sooo happy because I don't have to come to this school anymore and I don't have to listen to these teachers anymore either. That will be the beginning of my summer vacation. After Saturday, on Sunday I am going to Washington D.C. for five days with some of my classmates from school. After I get back from Washington I am going to camp with some more of my friends in Oregon. It's gonna be hecka fun. Well, that's what I was told. But until next time, I'm gone.

-Bay Chick

From The Beat: Your summer sounds very much like Princess' summer. Have you ever visited Washington D.C.? What did you think of it. Besides the Holocaust Museum, what else did you visit? The White House? The Supreme Court? The Air and space Museum?

Thoughts On The Beat

Sometimes I believe in what I'm saying because I been saying a lot of truth. I believe my words, not because somebody told me. It's because of me. But sometimes I don't believe what I'm saying because I've been lying.

I like the discussion better than the writing because we could be more interested. We could hear better.

What I would like to change about me is my attitude, my language, and that's it. What I like about The Beat Within is that we share things. We talk most of it but the thing I don't like is that we share and talk too much. We don't do nothin' fun.

-Lupe

From The Beat: What suggestions do you have for us that would qualify as doing something fun? To us, the discussion and the writing are both fun, so we need to hear your ideas of what having fun means. When do you find yourself lying, and when are you telling the truth? What about your attitude and your language do you want to change? What are you doing to change these things?

Summer Plans

My upcoming summer vacation is first to go to the Washington D.C. trip with 8th graders.

And when coming back going to Mexico or stay at home and chill and play video games or go shopping at New Park Mall in Newark or go to summer school at Menlo Atherton because my mom said I have to go. And that's something I just don't like! Shoot!

-Jaime

From The Beat: Why did you mom tell you that you have to go to summer school? What will you take there? It sounds like you're going to have a very full summer, part fun and part work. How was Washington D.C.? What did you like best about that trip?

Truth Hurts

Y'all comments is hella real but cruel. Some people can't take da truth. That bein' real can really hurt feelin's, like when y'all said Rina was a brat and I was hatin'. Y'all don't know me or Rina an' dat ain't cool.

-Hard Hitta

From The Beat: You're right, we don't know your or Rina, so all we have to judge is what you write in The Beat, and that's what our comments are meant to be about. We're sorry if some of those comments offended you. Our intention was to make you move to the next level of maturity, to think a little more seriously about some things, and not to be so negative about other things. Like we said, we're sorry if we were too harsh in how we expressed ourselves. (We've delivered your message to Will. He's flattered, but don't expect him to special delivery this Beat to you, or to call you. After all, he's the one who wrote that Rina was a brat and you were hatin', so maybe he wouldn't be as welcome as you think...) Good luck this summer!

The Beat

I like the writing and the discussions better because the writings were the topics about myself and family members or real life topics. But the discussions because some of them were interesting to me and I learned new things about life.

-I Smell Pan

From The Beat: Thanks for these kind words, Isaias. We've enjoyed having you in these workshops, and we hope you have a wonderful summer!

VOICES IN SPANISH

Tiempo Para Cambiar

Que tranzas locos. Soy Diablito. Pues, aqui nomas kicking back with some crazy homies. Estamos un poco aburridos, pero no hay pedo porque somos soldados de guerra y lo más importante es que nosotros somos una raza.

Pues todavía no se cuando vaya a salir pero espero que salga pronto porque allá afuera me estan esperando mis seres queridos. Tengo que recuperar el tiempo con mis carnalitos y llebarlos al parque o al cine. Empezar a trabajar con mi jefito otra vez para comprarme una ranfla.

Espero salir pronto. Pues extraño a mi familia, mis sobrinos y todas mis jainas. Pero saben que? Whenever I get released, estoy pensando en ir a Mexico por unos cuantos meses. Despues regresar y tratar de empezar una nueva vida que no? Bueno, se retira con orgullo y respeto.

From The Beat: Tienes muchas metas que cumplir. Esperamos que logres todos estos propositos. Creemos que ese viaje te ayudara siempre y cuando tú así lo quieras. Desgraciadamente en este mundo, en cualquier lado de este mundo, la violencia, drogas, pandilla existen, y vayas donde vayas, estan. Lo que tienes que hacer es alejarte de todas las cosas negativas que te puedan meter en problema. ¿Crees que puedas? Procura divertirte a lo máximo — pero, tenga cuidado.

Time To Change

What's up crazy people? It's me, Diablito. Well, I'm just here kicking back with some crazy homies. We're a little bit bored, but it's all good because we're soldiers of war and the most important thing is that we are one race.

Well, I still don't know when I am going to be getting out, but I hope I get out soon because my loved ones are waiting for me on the outs. I have to make up for the lost time with my little bros and take them to the park or to the movies.

Start working with my father again so I can buy myself a ride.

I hope to get out of here soon. Well, I miss my family, my nephews, and all my girlfriends, but y'all know what? Whenever I get released, I'm thinking about going to Mexico for a couple of months. Then, come back and try to start a new life, right? Well, I'm retiring with joy and respect.

-D, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You have a lot of goals to complete. We hope that you accomplish all these aims. We believe that that trip will always help you and when you want it to be that way. Unfortunately in this world, in any part of this world, the violence, drugs, and gangs exist, and regardless of where you go, they're going to be there, too. What you have to do is distance yourself from all the negative things that can put you in problems. Do you believe you can? Make sure you enjoy yourself to the maximum — but be careful.

Mi Vida Cambio Cuando . . . .

Mi vida cambio cuando llegue a YGC. Fue algo muy dificil de superar. Eso era triste porque es muy diferente estar en este lugar que en tu casa. Es por eso que yo me trato de mejorar porque yo quiero salir de aqui y tener una vida alegre con mi familia.

La vida cambio mucho. Ahora puedo valorar las cosas y tengo más respeto por mis mayores. Cuando salga de aqui creo que voy a hacer una nueva persona. Esa persona va a ser con un comportamiento diferente y voy a estudiar para obtener buenos grados.

Tambien cambie cuando llegue aqui porque antes era un persona muy feliz y ahora soy una persona triste. Mi vida cambio totalmente cuando llegue a este horrible lugar donde no puedes tener la libertad ni el apoyo como el de casa.

Cuando mi vida cambio fue muy triste porque creo que no es justo estar aqui. Creo que mi vida va a ser más triste y aburrida. Cuando salga voy a tratar de recuperar mi vida de antes: Ser feliz y pasarla bien con mi familia.

From The Beat: Así como tu vida cambio para mal, así la puedes cambiar a la forma como era antes. Sabemos que este lugar es muy triste, lo cual, creemos que deberías de hacer lo posible para salir de aqui. Conforme a lo que escribistes, podemos cactar que no eres un muchacho malo. Si esta experiencia te ha cambiado tu vida, aprende de esto y no vuelvas a pasar por lo mismo.

My Life Changed When . . . .

My life changed when I got to YGC. It was something very difficult to overcome. That was sad because it is very different being in this place compared to being at your house. That's why I try to better myself because I want to get out of here and have a happy life with my family.

Life changed a lot. Now I can value things and I have more respect for my elders. When I get out of here, I believe that I am going to be a new person. That person is going to behave differently and I am going to study so I can obtain good grades.

I also changed when I got here because before, I was a very happy person and now I am a sad person. My life completely changed when I came to this horrible place where you cannot have the freedom or the support like you have at home.

When my life changed, it was very sad because I believe it is not just being in here. I believe my life is going to be more sad and boring. When I get out, I am going to try and regain the life that I led before: Be happy and have good times with my family.

-Christian B2

From The Beat: Just like how your turn changed for the worse, you can change it to the way it was before. We know that this place is very sad and which we believe you should do whatever possible to get out of this place. Based on what you wrote in the above piece, we can conclude that you are not a bad guy. If this experience has changed your life, learn from it and make sure you don't go through this same experience again.

ANGEL FELIX *As he says in his letter to us, it's been a while since we've had Angel Felix in these pages. In the following brief pieces, he reminds us of who really gets hurt when we allow the system to take them from family that they love. In this case, both mother and uncle (Felix himself) let this sweet child down by putting their own desires ahead of her welfare. We hope that when Angel gets out of California State Prison Sacramento that he will make good on his promise to swoop this "abandoned" child up and provide her the love and protection that every child needs.*

Dedicated To My Niece

You my lil' Princess, regardless my love for you is unconditional. I hope you can forgive me someday for leavin' you all alone. The last letter I read from your mother damn near brought tears to my eyes. You're stuck back in that place, while she runs the streets all wild,

I hope you're safe, and I know the pain runs deep, but never forget I got mad love for ya. So don't ever give up hope lil' bre. You always been smart. Don't give up on your dreams. When I touch down I'll swoop you up, and you can leave that place and live with me.

Life

Thug life, rough life,
Sleepin' with glock fou' fives,
Kickin' up dust... before it clears another motha cries,
Black dress, droppin' tears on a closed casket,
Never made it out of O-R
High wrapped up in plastic,
The pain we make it,
but hopin' we don't meet that fate — or up in prison cell thirty-five without a date,
I contemplate, so many caught up in this storm,
Lives and families torn, I just wanna make it home.

Beat Within

Hello. It's been a while since I holla'd. I've been busy or whatnot. I'm getting closer to home, a little over two years left now. I didn't really feel like writin' a lot.

I got word about my lil' niece, and I been a little down and out. My circumstances, and all. But my lil' niece is like my kid. I raised her while my sister did time till I caught this case. When I get a chance I'll put together something you can feel. I'm used to spittin' it out.

Anyway, I'ma blast a flick too. I been writin' to The Beat for years now. Keep up your thing.

JT *Writing from the Deuel Vocational Institution in Tracy, CA J.T. offers a prayer for people to practice. Now, if you're not into prayer then maybe you can use his words in some other way — like a lesson or something of the sort. Sometimes prayer can be extremely soothing, or even meditating. We always accept suggestions on how to better yourself regardless what the method is.*

Prayer Chain

The person must say this prayer for three consecutive days. After three days the favor requested will be granted even if it may appear difficult. This prayer, including these instructions must be published immediately after the favor is granted without mentioning the favor, only your initials should appear at the bottom...

Holy Spirit who solves all problems, who lights all roads so that I can attain my goal

You who give me the divine gift to forgive and forget all my evil against me and that in all instance of my life you are with me.

I want in this short to thank you for all things and to confirm once again that I never want to be separated from you, even and in spite of all material illusion I want to be with you in eternal glory.

Thank you for your mercy towards me and mine.

You who give me the divine gift to forgive and forget all my evil against me and that in all instance of my life you are with me.

ISAAC CHIOINO *Awe, if you are into love poems, we have an excellent one for you this week. From this poem, we can tell that this writer from Preston Youth Correctional Facility (one of Y-A's institutions) in Ione, CA really loves his girl. Sometimes the best way to love someone else is by loving ourselves because usually that person is going to want the best for us anyways — well, at least if that person genuinely loves us. And we'll be better to them if we work on ourselves when the opportunity arises and what better time to work on ourselves than when we're incarcerated doing nothing but reflecting on what we've done and how we can make our situations better. Hopefully, Isaac will tackle all of this on his journey down the red brick road of love and its roller coaster of positives and negatives. If you want to send it to the one you love, don't forget to ask his permission first. As for Isaac, keep writing.*

New Love

This love I have for you is brand new
That's why I can't stop thinking about you
You're always on my mind, you'll always be in my heart
Thoughts of us always be together, never being apart
I knew you would be my lady by just the first glance
But I never would of thought that I would be caught up in this romance
I love your soft lips, I love your sexy eyes
When I come back to you I will give you a surprise
So keep that in your thoughts and hold onto it tight
Don't worry baby girl, I promise everything will be alright
Promise to hold you close when you cry and wipe away your tears
Promise to be by your side, through all the years
This love is all about trust, cause that's how we do
Now you best believe in me, cause this love we got is true...

You're always on my mind,
you'll always be in my heart
Thoughts of us always be together,
never being apart

ADAM AZEVEDO

The Beat warmly welcomes Adam Azevedo who sent the following pieces from the Sonoma County Jail. Adam has been fighting the "3 strikes law" in 3 counties. He has been successful in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties. He is currently in Sonoma County. He has been sentenced to 16 years. He hopes to be successful in removing the strikes in Sonoma County under the Romero Motion, and hopes he will be given time to run concurrent with what he already has to serve. With all this said, we welcome Adam to our pages and of course we wish him the best in fighting his case.

The Battle

When walls are closing in
I push with all my might
This cell has me trapped within
To escape is too much fight
The greater force that has me stuck
Is in my head and in my heart
To win this time will take more than luck
To tear these captive chains apart
I created these walls and this place
My guilt, my shame and my fear
I'm lost, stuck in this space
While time moves far but never near
Freedom lies in me, in my soul
I refuse to stay put waiting to sink
On my knees I'm made whole
With nothing but time in which to think

For Today

Everything must change
The motive, the walk, the stare
All I have to do is look at my I.D.
To see I don't want to go back there
I guess anyone can change
When forced in a structured environment
I hope to prove it in the real world
Sometime before I hit the age of retirement
I am 29 now
With nothing left but memories and signs
I never realized
The bad would outweigh the good times
This lifestyle has cost me all love and trust
Living in this filthy soul
Teaches that change is a must
I see the same people, eat the same food
Waking up in the morning,
Hoping today's C-O is in a good mood
I don't want this
There has to be a better option
I guess it should start
With lying to myself a little less often
After all,
It's really only myself that I con
I guess it's true
You don't appreciate what you have
Until it's gone

The Flip Side

While losing my wife because of my lifestyle
Living without you
Is like a morning without dew
A cloud without rain
A ball with no game
Breath with no life
A husband with no wife
A sun without shine
Is your life without mine
Though when you are here
Hope lies near
I see good through my eyes
I see life in blue skies
When you're by my side
I've never failed when I've tried
When I feel your touch
Life is never too much
All I know that's true
Is life hurts without you

MARCUS DU BOIS TURNER

If you were to break your life down in a book, what would the actual chapters look like? Well, this next writer answers these questions about his own life while making his debut in The Beat. And in doing so, have given us a reason to be excited to hear more. And since he's new, he probably isn't aware of the fact that at The Beat we feel just as grateful to receive your story as you feel when we publish it. It's a give and take relationship. A written piece for a printed publication. So when he inquires about what the next steps are, our only response is to write and send more pieces our way. If you want your voice heard, we have no problem with you using The Beat as a platform to do so. Hopefully, with consistency and perseverance, we'll be able to open another chapter in your life as you send us the pages of your book that have been turned already. Write on and we will surely read and publish on. Thank you for a great poem. Marcus writes us from the California State Prison in Soledad, Ca.

Dear Beat

Hello my name is Marcus D. Turner a gifted and talented young man. I enjoy displaying my thoughts to others with hope that a similar understanding may bring thoughts forward that have been locked up in one's subconscious memory.

I believe life has several chapters that many people would want to stay closed. I am one who believes in opening a chapter in life and studying the different routes that were once believe to be the right ones, but after careful study it was nothing more than a learning exercise.

Please take a look at a chapter in my life and display it as a tool for others to learn from. If Life's Chapter's is a poem that you may feel should be displayed, please write me with information on the next step to take.

Thank you

Life's Chapter's

I am closing the last chapter of the first book of my life
And starting the first chapter of the second book
And my life continues a new
A new beginning continues the saga
But change brings out a new birth of ever changing obstacles
That without perseverance, my reality of past trials
Will bring me back to the first chapter from which there is no return
I choose to prevail with successful ones
And separate myself from the barely surviving
This separation has allowed me the ability to comprehend my wrongs I used against my peers for internal gain
Now, I have broken the chains that have restrained me from true freedom
My soul is no longer camouflaged with empty dreams of success
Without the first chapter, I have no foundation
From which the second could exist
I believe one's destiny comes from the first chapters in life
What is accomplished is totally dependent on those choices that are made
As I turn the pages
I look at what I have become
I see the colorful wings of a butterfly
Free from pain
But dripping from the rain
Painting a beautiful picture on the pages of my life's chapters

Voices From The Ghetto Streets

Epilogue

People talking about keeping it real, people talking about different choices and new starts. People talking about how to fix this, how to fix that. Yeah, it's easy to solve the problem when the problem ain't yours to solve. It's easy to make the different choice when that choice ain't yours to make. You can say to yourself, "I've been there, done that" all you want, but does that change the circumstances of the choices you made in your life prior? And would knowing about those different choices change your frame of mind at the time and age in which you were living la vida loca!

Keep it real with yourself and stop trying to find that speck in your brother's eye when you yourself are blinded by a deceiving plank of self-absorbtion which comes from your recent self-awakening. Do not mistake me. I commend you fellows for reveling and rejoicing in your newfound transformation from waywardness to facing a more enlightened direction that's filled with goodwill and the wisdoms of your wayward experiences.

However, do not deceive yourselves into believing that you have the solutions to fixing the ghetto problems or how to mend broken homes. The various degrees of poverty and the off-springs which it breeds into generations of ghetto communities is far from easily being solved or even readily acknowledged. Especially for the generations of youth who live inside a private hell of child abuses, constant violence, cruelties and degradations that are kept deeply secret within that troubled juvenile youth.

Sure, you can change yourself and your attitudes, thus contribute your newfound transformations to the troubled ghetto and hope that by sharing your experiences similar afflictions, cruelties or transgressions you will be able to positively affect that generation of youth which you desire to reach or hope to contribute in its change through your wisdom of retrospection and powerful words. However, in doing so do not forget who you are talking to because the street only understands a certain type of communication and tha ghetto generations of today only hear or listen to a certain kind of beat. And trust me, it ain't that old school line or convict game anymore. Trust me. I know. I've been there, done that. Got over fifteen years in the hole and SHU time under my rug and I haven't even touched on my time in the gladiator trenches.

But like many of you strong brothers and sisters, I ain't proud enough to be proud of something like that. Spending life in any cage is not fun 'n games! I am ashamed of the pain that has caused, has been caused to our ghetto youth, which results from the legends of our street past or the ghetto legends that we left behind us and of which has attracted many of the last and next generation to follow in our footsteps.

We are both responsible for the contribution of rights and wrongs, or sharing with the youth of The Beat Within our personal stories which are both tragic and shattered but still left in pieces of hopes in changing the path of the next ghetto generations and doing it in a way where they can actually understand what we are sharing and be able to relate to us on a real level.

If you wish to speak to the ghetto, project class, you must speak the ghetto language, the project slang; if you wish to affect change inside a generation of the ghetto class you must be honest with yourself and as the popular saying goes, "keep it real." With that said I contribute this piece of a memory when I was only a fourteen, fifteen year old voice. This same memory from another time, place and era, which lives today in another fourteen or fifteen year old's voice that I know only too well....voices from the ghetto streets.

WILLIAM GRAJEDA

One of The Beat Within's favorite writers is back, and we are thrilled to have his thoughts, his voice showcased in our pages. It's real good to see you in The Beat William! We have known William Grajeda for years now, of course he has taken breaks in writing us, but his loyalty to himself, his family and The Beat readers keeps this thoughtful teacher writing our way. He even came down to our office, and considered working with us one time. Too bad he didn't. Well this week, William pens his pieces from Santa Rita County Jail in Dublin, CA where he is fighting to regain his freedom.

An Excerpt From A Letter

Hey how's it going? Hope all is well. I am enclosing two very important pieces that I feel should be contributed to The Beat Within pages. I have labeled them "Voices from the Ghetto Streets." They are very important pieces in that they both reveal the depth of the juvenile ghetto youth at a critical age in the first part. And the second part is to reveal or share the frustration that the youth feel when they can't understand some of the people who are using big words or too much political or philosophical dialogue.

I admit, at times I used to do this a lot myself until a lot of the juvenile youth told me when I got out they were trying to understand what I was spittin' but sometimes they couldn't understand my words when I spoke about the deeper politics or philosophy. Hence my attempt to "ghetto simplify" as much as possible when it comes to sharing with the youth.

Another thing, the truths of the ghetto can be hard to swallow at times and even too deep. But how does one affect change if one does not acknowledge the truth? Anyhow, thank you tremendously for all your support. I enjoyed seeing my writing published in the great Beat Within again.

Until my next contribution, sincerely always, warm affections for The Beat Within.

Voices From The Ghetto Streets

Prologue

Q-vole vato locos; what's up wit the game Young "G"?

So you getting' down in the street. So you stompin' your feet... lookin' for that next imaginary stripe to earn, lookin' for the next heart to burn. Why do you cause so much pain? Why do you hide your tears in vain? Someone shot a loved one today. Someone you knew got shot yesterday. Why is there so much anger and pain for tomorrow?

You don't know where you're going next. All you know is what's happening now.

Pass me the 40- ounce, pass me the blunt. Stop that baby sittin'...let's go cruising, let's go stunt. Wait, not before we get into some funk. I've always dreamed of mothers singing sweet lullabies. I've always wished to see fathers teaching their sons how to play catch.

Why is my life so screwed up? I am in juvenile hall for the tenth time. I am tired of camps and foster homes. I'm tired of being always lost and confused on my own, living on spur of the moments and sudden whims. Where am I going in life? What lies ahead? All I can see is this pain in my brain. All I can feel is this rage in my heart. So don't tell me lies about different choices or new starts.

I am fourteen, fifteen. Does it really matter? You can't tell me nothing anyways, because I don't care! You don't know me, so don't try to pretend. I'll only push you farther away! My mom is in prison and my dad is on the run. Don't talk to me about how you understand. Pass me that 40 -ounce, pass me the blunt. Stop baby-sittin' the party. I am on my way back to juvenile hall, then CYA this time. Of course this ain't my plan. I don't know this yet. I'm just drinking. I'm just smoking. I'm just trying my hardest to forget about my pain, to numb my shame, to blank out my brain. Don't try to talk to me about right or wrong. Don't try to preach to me your damaged songs. I'm fourteen, fifteen, you don't know me.

I am fourteen, fifteen years old, born on the ghetto streets. Mom's strung out, locked up again. The loser of the month still tryna call himself mama's friend. I gotta cop me a double, up to make some ends. I gotta pull back my cuete strap to be ready to defend. Pass me the 40-ounce, pass me the blunt. Stop baby-sittin', keep the rotation in line. I ain't listening to you or nobody.

I am fourteen, fifteen years in my scraper, going dumb, headed straight to my spot. Hyphy, tell me when to go. Tell me when to call. Purple, purple, headed straight to the spot. I just didn't know that I was about to turn into a dead end street and hit CYA.

Voices from the ghetto streets.

PRETTY BOY ***Starting off with a story about his own life, Pretty Boy takes us on a journey through the pressures of getting involved with a gang lifestyle. And as we were reading, well aware of the fact that he's probably been through a lot, we came to the conclusion that his mind was still stuck in the same place. However, when reading his letter to the creator of this great publication (we changed the title to Dear Beat, so as to address it to all of our readers), we almost felt embarrassed for thinking that way because not only is he saying he wants to help in a very powerful way, but he's also putting his words into action by offering spots on his CD. Each week we're bombarded by raps from some very talented people. And sometimes we wonder if maybe there's another platform people could use to be heard — we know often times that platform is a freestyle session. We're glad to have this first time writer here with us and writing from Pleasant Valley State Prison in Coalinga, CA. Hopefully, more people will start writing flows now. We'll see... Now bring on Chapter 3 Pretty Boy! You have us hooked.***

I'd even love to speak to the youth in (nine) months when I'm free!! For I know what they feel and I've been there, done that, and in all honesty I don't want to do it again. (My brothers and sisters need to know why).

Dear Beat

My name is Carlos Houle aka Pretty Boy. I am 22 years old, currently incarcerated at "Pleasant Valley State Prison." I'm originally from the East Bay, Hayward, CA. Currently serving time for weapons transportation, residential burglary, drug trafficking, being an active criminal street gang member, and organized crime... am I proud of this? (Never) because to do the above things does not take a man!! Even murder can be done by a child. In our future letters I shall explain what a real man is.

This is my first time reaching out to The Beat and I do not know if this will ever be published... though my heart certainly does hope so! Before I go any further allow me to introduce a little bit about myself. I am a rap/hip hop artist who used to be signed to (Ill Minded Productions) with ties to (Envasion. ENT). My music has been played on the radio by Affiliate DJ's and I was currently working on my solo debut album in 2004 before my incarceration. I was facing over 28 years when I was pulled over on May 26th 2004. Luckily God had a plan for my life and gave me a chance... I will be returning to the community and my freedom in a physical sense in about (9) months!!!

In my life, I've done a lot: I've sold women, sold kilos of drugs, been stabbed, done shootings, put hits out on people, been through all those juvenile steps, directed organized crime, etc. etc.

But I've also done positive: I got my GED, went to college, I worked for good jobs in suites, I was even discipled to be a "youth pastor"...etc. (I am a Christian but my heart is a non-denominational).

There is a lot I'd love to share with you Mr. Inocencio as well as The Beat... so much I'd love to share and contribute if you guys would ever give me the chance, I'd even love to speak to the youth in (nine) months when I'm free!! For I know what they feel and I've been there, done that, and in all honesty I don't want to do it again. (My brothers and sisters need to know why).

Currently I am speaking to a couple of people who want to write a "Biography" on my life... so that is currently the task at hand and I will share a couple of pieces with you if you like and if you like it I shall submit it all as we go on. Before I go allow me to get a very important point: brothers and sisters... young and old... I want to say that "I love you!!" I bet a lot of you have heard that before huh? Yeah, well I just don't want to say it... I'd rather show you with actions because actions do speak louder than words. A lot of you are in pain and I can only imagine what is going through your mind. "Life has many obstacles and tests that can leave one to cease or leave one to progress." You do have the strength to overcome... for the source lies within your heart... allow it to guide you... listen to it brothers and sisters for it never lies!! I'm in (hopes) that if "Mr. Inocencio and God willing" I will be able to meet you all soon.

Iron sharpens iron and we all can help each other. I want to say whatever you're going through, whatever hurt that you're feeling, however cold that cell is or hot, remember after every stormy night comes a bright and sunny day! Sometimes we face many trials and tribulations in our lives, don't we? Feeling like things will never get better? Well something I used to tell people when I was being discipled as a "youth pastor" is this: never give up. Good things come and a lot of the time we can't see them. For everyone has a blessing in the midst of the storm. The key is allowing our heart to guide us through the storm so we can receive those blessings... all of you brothers and sisters are beautiful, unique, and special... truly 1 of a kind... "Please" let no one tell you otherwise. I can't express that enough to all of you and things will get better, but first it starts with change! Scary word, ain't it? Yes it is, but guess what? It's our best friend! "Advancement demands change." Allow us to change the way we think, change the way we see, change the way we walk and talk, importantly change the way we live!

Those are goals that can be reached and I want to help you all as we go on. God has put it in my heart and I give a life long commitment to The Beat. This is etched into my heart!!!

Currently I have over 500 poems and 150 raps songs all authored by me growing day by day. Rest assured you will all have a chance to see what lies in my heart, what smiles I've had and what tears and pain I've endured through. You all are so very, very special to me!! Please know that...for I care with all my heart and you are not alone. We must all stand together in love, strength, and support to change our lives for our families, our future, and most importantly for ourselves. I feel we are all "world changers" and we have the ability to do so. (Believe that!)

Currently as I read I see we have some "Music Talent" out there... brothers and sisters who really want to change and do things (make money) the "legit" way. Well I want to help some of you. My rap solo debut album is still going to be coming out and I'm open to have some of you who are serious about their music and who want to change on this CD!! And anyone who I can help or who has questions about life or anything just ask Mr. Inocencio and I'm (more) than willing to answer and help... that "my promise" singers, rappers, brothers, and sisters, anyone with a gift let's use it to change our lives and get what we want the right way... because we can do it!

My brothers and sisters, I hope that some of you grasp this for every word comes from my heart... I ain't got time for games. I have wasted too much of my life on games... what about you? Are you still playing games? Are you ready to expand like the waves expand over the sands? The answer lies within your heart... listen to it... search it... and you shall find rest, success, and paradise.

I love you all brothers and sisters. I hope you all accept me in the family... because my arms wide open to you (yes you holding this Beat).

God bless, keep your head up and shoot for your dreams!

I hope to hear from you/see you soon...

Your brother/friend

The Memories in My Life

Intro: In life we are all faced with a certain amount of obstacles or problems. Some obstacles can be drugs, sex, money, power, violence, and gangs… mine was all (6) and then some. But no matter how old, or how young rich or poor we all have our stories and struggles to tell. Pain knows no age or wealth. Pain is a very big portion of life and some may experience it more then others. So with that said I will begin from the beginning and take you through smiles, laughs, tears, death, and last, pain. This is my story — this is my life…get comfortable and allow me to share it with you…

Chapter#1:

I was born in Hayward, CA on May 1st, 1984. My mother is Susie Lopez and my father is Randy Houle. My mother was a Home Maker; she didn't really do too much job wise. Her job was raising (4) rebellious kids so I guess that is pretty much enough. As for my father, he worked for GMC and had a well off job. We were all mainly taken care of. My father was an alcoholic who used to beat on my mom a lot. But I'm proud he realized what he was doing was being a coward and eventually he stopped.

I have to say my mom is a very strong woman to be able to endure in all the pain and suffering she went through — from all of us to be honest. I was born into gangs. Gangs have always been a part of an everyday obstacle that we all faced. Uncles – Aunts – Cousins - and family were all surrounded by this hostile way of living. Why we choose to live that way I cannot answer! For in life we all make choices, good and bad and everyone has their reasons. My oldest cousin who I call my brother is Robert Lopez who my mom helped raise. He has been through all the prison systems basically and was rarely seen due to his incarceration status. He was a prime example of what a O.G Gangster was and who has been through it all (he was My Role Model).

My sister was a (chola). Her name is Michelle Lopez. She was also a person who I looked up to because she was strong and ready to handle any business. Though, to this day we ain't very close, I pray that one day we can look at each other, say, "I love you" and get through life together as family. My heartaches because I truly love her. As for my little brother Michael Houle he will come along later. Without him I would not be alive to tell this story. As for my punk ass brother Randy Houle who left us all who I regret you'll know me very well by the time you turn the last page in this book!…

Chapter#2:

"Carlos wake up it's time to get ready for school" My mom yelled. I woke up and stared at the ceiling. Another day has come and to be quite honest I don't want anything to do with it. I can smell breakfast that my mom has cooked. I hear the oldies on the radio that my mom is playing and it puts a smile on my face as she always does. I shake the sheets and

PRETTY BOY (CONT.)

get up to go to the bathroom. I get in the hallway and see my clothes I picked out from the previous night all ironed and ready. I don't eat, but shower, and get ready. I remembered something was supposed to go down at the school today so I call up my homie Miguel. "What's up homie?" Miguel says.

"Nothing homie just getting finished on my way out" I reply. "So what's this thing going down at the school" I ask.

"Homie those vatos won't stop disrespecting or nothing. We know it's the Soto brothers because they're the ones all them fools be listening to." replies Miguel.

"Homie, peep this, today after school let's get the homies and do what we got to do. I am getting way too sick of this shhh."

"Me too Carlos, the homies are meeting in the back of the 7-11 store in 1 hour. Can you make it?" asks Miguel.

"Come on homie, miss me with that dumb question" I state as I hang up.

"Mijo, what was that all about?" asks my mom.

"Nothing, it's my business. Don't trip, O.K." I say.

"But Mijo, I worry about you."

"Yeah I know but it still don't change anything mom," I say. I love you I tell her and slam the door as I leave… I was 11 years old.

The air was cold and it was still kind of dark. I could see the sun creeping up and the sky was a dark blue. I remember getting pumped up with every step that I took, contemplating on what the outcome would be of today's meeting. When I arrived, there was about (twenty plus) homies already there. Fitted as usual and looking more pumped up as myself.

Right away I noticed seven homies: Chucky, Solo, Mobster, Creeper, Payaso, Miguel, and Richard. Another was Anthony who was playing with a knife with a big smile on his face. Miguel came up to me and shook my hand. "Carlos, it's going down, the homie Oso is getting more homies." The opposition was very deep I guess it was going to be a big fight. I went around and shook all the homies hands and we all started to talk. As we were talking (eight) individuals from the opposition were walking on to the campus, doing their best to mean mug all of us to the best of their ability. I jumped off the bench and started to walk towards them. Miguel and other homies began to follow. "Miguel lets set this off now," I said. Miguel just smiled with an excited wild look in his eyes.

Some of our girls were watching us walk towards our battle and they were yelling to us to stop. As the first punches were thrown, we could hear a lot of the girls screaming. But to be quite frank and honest no one cared. Young, selfish, unwise, and lost is all I can say…

Chapter #3 (to be continued…)

PLAYBOY ***Sometimes we find ourselves in situations that are so dreadful that our dreams are the only things that offer hope. This is the case with this first time writer who sends us this piece from Glen Mills in Concordville, PA. 'A Homeboy's Dream' is a sweet one about someone he's obviously attracted to and how he keeps dreaming about this person. Great poem, hopefully the lucky person that this is dedicated to will get to read it.***

Looking in your eyes

Catching the sparkle of the light

Getting lost forever

Wondering if I'm all right

A Homeboy's Dream

Sexy little smile
With those sexy little lips
Thinking about the first time
That we ever kissed
Looking in your eyes
Catching the sparkle of the light
Getting lost forever
Wondering if I'm all right
As I go to touch your face
And hold on to you tight
I wake up in the dark
And realize it's the same dream
From the other night

SANTIAGO GONZALES ***Anyone who read Part I of Santiago Gonzales' brilliant "escape plan" will be eager to see where it all went... In Part II, the entire plot begins to fade from his mind as he experiences the "pleasures" of a Federal Pen (Florence, Arizona) as compared to what he was used to in California's prisons — nothing! Here, he is amazed at the freedom of movement, the art on the walls, the profusion of health and hygiene products, the food, the reasonable staff — all things missing from his experiences in California. In fact, things are almost too good here, so the escape plan begins to fade from his mind. We'll have to wait for Part III to find out whether he moves forward with his plan, or not. Santiago writes from the deplorable Salinas Valley State Prison.***

The Escape, Part II

Early the next morning they woke me up around four a.m. and told me to roll it up. Everyone who was on the plane with me was shackled up and we were placed on the plane again. Our breakfast was sack lunches again with infamous cheese crackers. When we departed Oklahoma City Airport, the sun was barely rising and it was a clear day with a few patchy dark clouds. I got to sit by the window and I'll never forget the beautiful scenery. It as like a beautiful painting of a countryside that literally came to life before my eyes. As the plane ascended, I looked out my window and I seen acres of plush tall green grass, meadows and ponds, a red barn and horses grazing. The sun was giving life to all this as I looked upon it, and the plane went higher and we were gone!

It was an hour before we got to Arizona and I caught a glimpse of the spectacular, enormous Grand Canyon. We landed at Sky Harbor International Airport in Phoenix at around 2:00 pm, on a Friday, August 24, 2001. There was the U.S. Marshalls again surrounding the plane heavily armed, the busses and vans pulled up and finally me. I was taken to an old white bus that was all beat up, and compared to all the newer busses I thought they were taking to an old beat up jail that served beans and water for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The two Federal Corrections Officers took custody of me from the U.S. Marshals and put me on the beat up old white bus. It was me, the bus driver and the CO who sat in a cage at the back of the bus with a shotgun.

The heat was tremendous! A hundred and fifteen in the shade. The air conditioning on the bus kept turning off and with the windows opened, all that flowed in was heat. Hot, Dry heat. It was a long ride. It was unforgettable. There were cactus by the millions! Cactus forever, and desert. Vast unending Desert with prickly, spiny cactuses and the dry hot sun beating down. Rocks, dirt, plants and birds. I was feeling so far gone, like I got the hell away! I sat gazing out the window, listening to the old bus clunk, clunk, clunk along. That old bus sounded like it was about to die from heat exhaustion or worse!

They had me fooled. I could've swore I was going to a small jail that couldn't even afford a decent new bus. Was I so wrong. When we drove into the town of Florence, Arizona, the first thing I noticed was the huge silver water tank that sits like a big silver golf ball on top of a golf tee. That itself sets smack in the middle of Arizona State Prison. This is a big gray prison, old and scary looking, similar to the scary look that old Folsom has to it. Then we passed another small prison where inmates in orange jumpsuits were out walking, and we passed a small brick building that turned out to be the county jail. I was disappointed. But we drove passed it, then I seen a lot of razor wire, and cars parked in front. That's where the bus pulled into — Central Arizona's Detention Center, CCA.(Corrections Corporation of America)

I got out of the hot Arizona heat and into an Arctic freezing environment. It was a huge place. Where I was booked resembled any typical jail type setting. They take your mug shot, give you a T.B. shot, take your clothes and issue you a green uniform, a pair of shower shoes, blue cotton blankets, sheets. They issue you an ear piece so you can listen to the TV. The day I got there while I was being processed they were showing DVDs. That day, they were showing the movie "Hannibal," The Sequel to Silence of the Lambs. I just missed it!

When I got to my assigned dorm it was unlike any modern prison I ever seen. Let me describe it to you. They led me out of the booking area. We made a right out onto a wide, long corridor. The walls were painted white, the concrete floors were highly polished with wax. It was late at night, around 11:00 pm, so the corridors were vacant and deserted. We passed a coke machine and a water fountain. We stopped at a grill gate made of bars. An intercom button was pressed by the CO escorting me. The camera pointed at the grilled gate, moved, and the grill gate opened. I was looking down an endless, shiny concrete corridor with grill gates at every thirty yards.

As I walked through, the first thing I noticed was a beautiful painting on the wall to my right, a mural of a horse and some Indians and an eagle flying above them on a grassy hill next to a tree. I stopped and looked. Then, as we walked there was another mural painted next to that one, and another as we walked along. In fact, the whole entire prison was painted with murals along the walls of every labyrinth of corridors in that place, professional and artistic. Murals of whales, killer whales swimming in the sea, blue whales, porpoises. There were murals of people skiing in the snow, and a mural of a log cabin covered with snow and a truck with Alaska license plate, more murals of Indians, horses, feathers, the silhouette of sky scrapers at night. There was a mural of an ancient planet populated with dinosaurs, and a mural of an ancient planet populated with dinosaurs, and a mural of the planets in our solar system. I found out later that the Alaskan inmates were the ones that painstakingly painted each and all the murals in that place. That place belonged to the Alaskan inmates and that's who was gonna help me to escape.

I was placed in a orientation dorm when I got there where I would be processed. When I got to my cell I went fast to sleep. I was home. In the morning, I woke up to the sound of someone yelling, "Llegua, llegua!" That means come to breakfast in Spanish. Everyone exited the dorm and lined up single file along the wall out in the corridor. That was the first time I got to see my fellow inmates. We were all dressed in green pants, green shirt, and blue slip on deck shoes. Most were all Mexicans, illegal aliens, and Chicanos, "AZ Boys." There were a few white boys and a few natives (Indians), but mostly there was Mexicans that didn't speak a lick of English.

One by one we all filed thru and got our tray. The food was splendid for a jail. I got full, and the coffee was hot and strong! Just the way I like it. They place a container of steamin' hot coffee in the dorm, and there's plenty to go around. There's only sixty-five men in a dorm. I drank my share of coffee and got lit up. Then I sat to watch TV while the inmate workers cleaned up. I plugged my ear piece in and sat to watch TV. You won't believe this, but the only channel I watched was the country music video channel. I had not got to watch television from 1994 to August, 2001, and there I was watching the country music videos on cable! I wanted to cry, it had been so many years I couldn't watch TV in prison in California. There was a vast selection of TV channels to select from. The Mexicans had their own TV. The English TV I was watching had all the channels the Mexicans could get as well on their TV. There was the Country Music Channel that played country music 24/7 a day, Trick Pony, Toby Keith, Brooks and Dunn, and so on. They showed MTV, USA Channel, TNT, TBS, The Discovery Channel, The History Channel, and Court TV.

Court TV was one of my favorite channels besides The Country Music Video Channel. They would show the actual murder trials in real time on TV. Sometimes Cinemax would show for promotion specials two weeks at a time! Then on Friday and Saturday nights, they would show DVDs of all the latest newest movies out on DVD. I had my own spot at a table where only I could sit and we used to kick it and watch the movies on Friday and Saturday nights, munching out on microwave popcorn and drinking 20 oz. sodas with ice. Each dorm had a microwave oven and an ice chest!

But I get too ahead of myself. Back in my orientation dorm I watched television with my little ear piece. There's no volume on the TV, that's why they issue ear pieces. But you can buy long cords in the store and hook up a pair of headphones. They sell am/fm radios in the store as well. Once a week they give you a tube of toothpaste, a toothbrush, deodorant, soap and shampoo for free! I spent

continued on next page

SANTIAGO GONZALES (CONT.)

continued from previous page

so many years in California using only state soap and tooth powder from 1994 to 2001. The toothpaste was minty, the soap and shampoo smelled so good.

The first shower I took, the water was so hot and the stream of water jet skiing out of the shower head! I must've lathered and scrubbed again and again until I was raw and exhausted from the heat. I brushed my teeth over and over with the minty toothpaste. Then I put on my green uniform after drying off and putting that clean smelling deodorant underneath my armpits. Eventually the day came I was moved out of my orientation dorm to more stable housing. I was taken to unit 500 A dorm. After so many years in prison without friends, without TV — without, without, without — I was free.

I made friends with a lot of people, but I mainly stuck with the Spanish speaking people. Within two weeks I was working for a dollar a day as bi-lingual clerk, except I didn't know a lick of Spanish. I got by though, and it paid by the week. My first seven dollars I bought a couple of cans of real menudo, a big bag of nacho cheese tortilla chips, a couple sodas, a few soups and a couple of microwave popcorn. I pigged out big time! The store there was like a supermarket! They sold sweats, underwear, radios, personal am/fm radios by Aiwa with headphones. Batteries for your radio, ice cream like Hagen Daas, soups, beans, tortilla chips, sodas, coffee, soaps like Lever 2000 and Irish Spring, sport scent. I can't even begin to describe every item they sold in that store.

I was so caught up in the whole experience I temporarily forgot of escaping. I forgot California just gave me 59 years! Besides, when I met my attorney and told him my story, I asked him how long could he keep me there and postpone the trial, and he said he could delay the trial several years I need not worry. Instead of me being charged with a bomb threat in state court, I was indicted by a federal grand jury, and because of that "detained" in a federal facility. But CCA was not solely a Federal Detention Facility. CCA is a corporation that contracts this facility to the U.S. Marshal for Federal prisoners going to trial on federal indictments. But CCA also contracts out to the state of Alaska and the state of Hawaii. Therefore, CCA also houses state prisoners from Alaska and Hawaii, but in separate dorms, and in different color uniforms. Hawaiians wear blue, Alaskans wear gray, feds green.

That place did not resemble a prison at all. During the day the corridors were filled with hundreds of people, inmates in all different colored uniforms, female nurses all wearing maroon uniforms, civilian clothing of plumbers, electricians and food workers. The case managers and assistant wardens all wore civilian clothes. The corridors were filled with people all morning long, people going to work, people going here and there. In the morning I would leave the dorm and go with the inmates who had pill call just so I could take a stroll. I would get lost walking for miles, admiring the beauty of that place, looking in all the dorms at the inmates watching TV, cooking food in the micro wave, playing cards, listening to their personal radios. I would study the details in the painting of all the murals. I'd watch the inmates go to yard, I was free!

There were two vast libraries where inmates could check out leisure reading books, and there was one law library with a vast selection of legal books. It was a complete law library with every federal reporter, federal practice digest 4th ed. All the United States Code books annotated. Every law book was there. That's where I spent so many hours and days studying and studying about my case. That's one of the reasons I slowed my roll about escaping. But I get ahead of myself again.

ERNEST REYNOLDS

Much as we hate to admit it, not everybody loves The Beat. In fact, it's fair to say that this next writer thoroughly dislikes what he sees in these pages. While we think there is merit in some of his criticisms about the racism he finds in some of the pieces we publish, we have to say that we don't think Mr. Reynolds fully appreciates the fact that racism is still alive and well in this country (whether people have "moved on" from slave days or not), and that far too often its effects are felt by young minority men at the hands of the police, who they see as representing the government. When he writes "There is no oppression in this country!" or, "if it wasn't for white people, we wouldn't have what we have now in this country," we think it reveals a streak of his own unacknowledged or unconscious racism. We could substitute any race in that sentence, and come up with exactly the same conclusion: Without the contributions of blacks, Latinos and Asians, we would not have what we have now in this country! (The "contributions" of entire Native American cultures and peoples was their annihilation!) This, of course, does not excuse anti-white racism any more than examples of bad behavior by blacks excuses anti-black racism. Indeed, we think this writer hits the nail squarely on the head when he writes that too many youth use racism as an excuse for their own criminal choices rather than examining themselves. The truth about race is that it has no scientific reality, and that most of us are racial mongrels. As biology, race is an "invalid paradigm." But as sociology, it is still a powerful reality in the minds of people. As for allowing anti-American sentiment in The Beat, we try to allow all sentiment here. We have published pieces both defending and attacking the U.S.-led War in Iraq. (And, for the record, while we agree that Saddam Hussein was one of the world's worst villains, the reasons the President gave for invading Iraq were not to remove this tyrant, but to locate "weapons of mass destruction" — reasons that turned out to be false.) There are other tyrants in the world just as reprehensible as Hussein whom we do business with and allow to continue torturing their people, but unlike Hussein, they are not sitting on the world's second largest oil reserves... Draw whatever conclusions you'd like... While some may believe "My country, right or wrong," many of us believe that speaking out against policies we can't support, far from being anti-American, represents the highest form of patriotism. While we agree that America offers tremendous opportunities for economic advancement — and gives us the freedom to express our views — we don't think our country is above criticism. So we will respect his wishes and not ask Ernest Reynolds — who decries us from his cell at California Correctional Institution, Tehachapi — to draw for us. His word painting is quite enough, thank you... (Unless, of course, he feels the urge to respond to our response... which we apologize for making as long as his piece itself!)

Totally Disgusted With The Beat

I'm writing to comment on your publication. Let me start off by saying I'm currently locked up myself at CCI in Tehachapi State Prison. I've asked for your magazine in hopes of hearing intelligent discussions and positive feedback to those misguided youth.

But I'm very disappointed in the blatant racism against white people. And even more disturbed that as adults I haven't read one time you correct them on that issue. So you must feel the same as they do!

You know, if it wasn't for white people we wouldn't have what have now in this country! People put themselves in juvenile hall, or CYA, or prison. There is no oppression in this country! Just a bunch of cry babies! Most people come to America for a better life. So where's the oppression at? People are treated better here than in their own country by their own people. But yet they hate white people!

It's wrong to be racist no matter what race you are or what race you direct it to. Anybody can look for reasons to be revengeful. The history book is full of it. Do these black youth that complain about racism by whites also know that the Black Moors invaded Southern Europe and enslaved whites? The war lasted over 600 years. I don't hear them complaining over there! They got over it and moved on, didn't use it as an excuse to sell dope or kill people.

I also wanted to comment on the whole anti-American issue that was in volume 10.47. Why are you and those youth so against the War in Iraq? Saddam Hussein is a mass murdered and torturer, and oppressor of his own people. I thought people dislike that stuff. You know, remember World War II! The whole Hitler Nazi trip! So I guess it's cool to stand by and let people be tortured and killed for the hell of it. Damn America for helping those people!

Your magazine is the lamest, stupidest thing I've ever read in my life. I laughed my ass off when you guys had the balls to ask me to help you out and draw a picture. I've never read such a racist, ignorant magazine before in my life. I would never help people like that promote the hatred of my race and country!

If you hate helping the oppressed people of the world, you should be the last group of people to give advice to those kids. You should tell them it's wrong to hate people, just like you would a white kid if he wrote a bunch of racist stuff about their race!

Anyways, I would appreciate it if you never send me another magazine. And it's a big NO on the drawing.

THE POETIC PRISONER

After coming home for what looks like his last time from CYA, The Poetic Prisoner has been keeping his head high in times of trials and tribulations. He's doing well now, working two full time jobs and trying to start his life and ground it solidly. However, like with anyone else's life, he has his share of things to deal with. Like a younger brother who he extremely loves, yet doesn't agree with. We know both of them and they're both loved beyond comprehension, but as we all do they make mistakes and have to call each other on them. Listen to The Poetic Prisoner pull his brother's coattail about a few things. He's writing from our office where he sits down and zones out on his music probably hoping that you'll zone out on his poem. Let us know what you think of this OG BWO writer. Thanks PP!

Only Want The Best For You

What the hell is yo' problem?
Can't you see you're just perpetuating the set up?
Our country wants yo' black ass on the street hustlin'
They want you to disregard everything else in order to get bucks.
Want you to be addicted to receiving money from a hopeless hoe
After selling her a dream and convincing her to get fucked.
Want you to continue falling
Knowing it'll be that much harder for you to get up.
And you're giving them exactly what they want,
And to be all the way real, I'm fed up.
A grown man would at least take ownership for his mistakes,
And he'd do so while keeping his head up.
He'd recognize that his destructive actions are the sole reason
He hauled buns like a bread truck.
What kind of man treats his own people like that?
Disrespecting his family — refusing to spread love.
And you said what!?!?
Lil' Bruh, you've been my best friend since you was a lil' ass boy.
We had different sperm donors,
But I always looked out for you like yo' last name was Roy.
I remember the days when you wouldn't let me out of your sight.
Our conversations through the crack of our bunk beds late at night.
Right-handed boxing glove for you, the left one for me
When we would play fight.
Couldn't keep up with the rest of us,
So I had to take all that extra stuff off your bike.
Like twins we shared everything — even life,
And now you speak as though I'm not on your side.
How can I be when even you're not?
Your behavior needs to be revised.
You're breaking strong family ties,
By chasing a twisted definition of what it means to shine.
You can front for everyone else,
I still see that vulnerable child when I look into your eyes.
And I don't know why it's such a surprise
That I wouldn't let you put your hands on our momma.
Blind-sided — please,
You had it comin' — you brought the drama.
I'ma Lion King my damn self,
And I'll be damned if I allow myself to cause discomfort in my kingdom.
Big pimpin', you should know hoes are made for the street,
Yo' mama's house is not where you bring 'em.
But hey, I know you know this,
Any pimp would.
They'd also know they got their game from their mama,
And should do nothing but treat her good.
I didn't want to do what I did,
But if you lived my life, you'd do the same.
I had flashbacks of her ex-boyfriends
Inflicting that same kind of pain.
Restricting her from movement
When she's the reason you're breathing in the first place.
If, at that moment, I had the power to make the earth shake,
The whole world would've felt the wrath of my earthquake.
You put me in a precarious position,
So I acted as such.
But that doesn't take away the fact that you're my best friend,
And I still love you just as much.
A part of me understands what's up,
I'm just not on that hype.
I've been locked up for too long,
I deserve to live my life.
And the same goes for you,
It's sickening witnessing so much wasted intelligence.
You say what you're doing is beneficial,
But I have yet to see its relevance.
You can't do what you're doing forever,
You'll eventually come around.
So why continue to procrastinate on furthering yourself,
You might as well start now.
Before you end up right back in the county,
Or worse yet, six feet underground.
Before all that fast talking just becomes sound,
And a loved one can longer be found.
Just know that for you, I've always been down,
When you gain it and when you lose it.
Both of us are strong people,
Regardless of the situation individually we gon' get through it.
I just want you to know
I think what you're doing is not only foolish, but stupid.
I only want the best for you,
And I've got a six inch scar to prove it.

ISMAEL VALDIVIA

Ismael gives us his own little introduction and we appreciate it because it means less work for us. He tackles a topic we're sure everyone has experienced if they are in jail. And that's struggling between loving someone and wanting to continue to live the fast life. A life that's fast has no time to be with just one woman. That is, of course, if the woman is that special. From the looks of this poem, the woman wasn't special enough to keep him from doing what he wants to do. Like he says in his introduction letter, he's writing from the Santa Cruz County Jail and we wish him the best of luck with his case. Read on and see if you can use this poem like he's suggested.

To: The Beat Within

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Ismael A.K.A. Ish. I am a long time contributor to your magazine. I've been writing on and off for you since the age of eleven from the Santa Cruz County Juvenile Hall. I now find myself at the age of nineteen in the Santa Cruz County Jail.

I would like to continue to contribute to your magazine as well as get an updated issue if it's not too much trouble. I have a poem right here that I wrote for all you young men that think you a player, including myself. So do what I couldn't do and and give this poem to your girl who for some reason you can't stay faithful to and save her future heartbreaks.

Why I Let You Go

Lately I've been thinking of you
Recalling our special times together
You are the one whom I always talk to
About my problems that I can't conquer
Your concern and love mean a lot to me
Your desire, affection, faith, and passion
Bring so much joy and makes me feel happy
I thank you my love for your devotion
But at this moment the truth must prevail
I have to let go of you and be free to drift them streets
I am now wearing my veil
I am now ready and always will be
Even though you and I will be apart
My love, you will always be in my heart

Dear Beat And Readers

What's up? Me, nothing much. Sitting here in CDCR AKA CYA. As I come to my last day in here I decided to share how I ended up in here. I hope I don't bore anyone. And I hope that youngsters get my message.

I got locked up at 16 and now I'm gonna be 21 in July this year. It's hard to enter back into the community after being locked up for so long. Like I've been told over and over in here, "The world doesn't stop and wait for you to get out" so in other words, the world changes with you or without you in it. So stay out of trouble, cus the next stop after juvie isn't always the ranch or CYA. You could end up in prison.

Sincerely,

PRESIDENT JFK **From Santa Clara Juvenile Hall to Dewitt Nelson (one of Y-A's several institutions), President JFK aka John explains a little bit about what got him to where he is now. And we always wonder with someone as intelligent as this: what will it take for this person to see the light and realize that their action are doing nothing but harming them. Week in and week out we're bombarded with pieces, letter, raps, artwork, poems and a whole laundry list of other kinds of writing that express the struggles of being incarcerated and living on the street. They express deep pain in being snatched away from a loved one, or remembering a lost love. Express deep anger at being told what to do, or having to be around people you wouldn't normally associate with. And yet with all this expression, something still exists within us that makes us want to risk our well-being. Where does this come from? How can we suppress it? And who can help us? We'll work out these questions later, as for now, let's read on and see if we like it.**

It's hard to enter back into the community after being locked up for so long. Like I've been told over and over in here, "The world doesn't stop and wait for you to get out" so in other words, the world changes with you or without you in it.

AKA

Through my whole life, I've been called by many different monikers. My first was Baby Mike. My family still calls me that. I've been called over twenty different names, but the one I like to be called out of all of them is Baby Blue. Baby Blue is my favorite color, I'm always wearing it. I was 16 years old with a short temper. March 5, 2002 is a day I would never forget it was the day I was accused of rape. I went through the court for four months until I was talked into a plea bargain.

June 14th 2002. I went to James Boys' Ranch in Morgan Hill. My program was going smooth. Until one person upset me. Instead of talking it out, I plotted. It was 2002 at 11:25 pm. I got dressed. I put my bathrobe on to conceal my clothing. I put my combination lock inside a sock and wrapped it around my hand. I acted like I was using the restroom.

When I approached my victims bed, I unrolled the lock, the night man, noticed that I was headed in the wrong direction and he seen something hanging from my hand. But it was too late. I swung and heard a loud crack, followed by screaming. I fled. I was running nonstop for about a half hour. I see emergency vehicles fly past as I hid in the bushes. I finally got to McDonalds and tried to make a collect call and couldn't get through, so I decided to walk.

I found a monetary road I knew it led all the way into downtown San Jose. It seemed like I was walking for days. I finally reached my cousin's house. The next two weeks I was an outlaw stealing, smoking weed, beer runs, until I almost got alcohol poisoning. My cousin and a couple of friends left me on my front porch after a long day and night of drinking. My step dad's brother found me on and he helped me into the house.

I made a deal with my mother; we agreed that I would turn myself in after two weeks. On the day I was going to turn myself in, I got into a twenty minute foot chase with the police. I didn't know how they found me and I still don't know, but they did. I was put into B9 in Juvie. I got into a fight and they moved me to B8. I went through the court thing again. October 21, 2001. The court committed me to CYA for assault with a deadly weapon, escape, and resisting arrest. November 20, 2002 I went to CYA. In Sacramento, I went to two other institutions: Karl Holton and Dewitt Nelson.

Then the day everyone in CYA waits for: their PCD (parole consideration date). Mine was April 1, 2005. They paroled me. I thought it was an April fool's joke. But it wasn't, I couldn't take the smile off my face. That's how happy I was. I had to wait till April 4 to take the Greyhound to Fresno to a group home. The group home owner was so sweet to me. She always called me her favorite, out of 6. April 30, 2005, I was out passed curfew, and I thought they were going to send me back to CYA. I didn't chance it. I caught the Greyhound back to San Jose, CA. I had my fun.

May 7, 2005, I was riding my uncle's low-rider to the store when a cop stopped me for riding on the sidewalk. He ran my name, 15 minutes later they told me I had a warrant for my arrest when I knew. My mom picked up my stuff and the low-rider before they took me to SJ County Jail. May 11, 2005 I went back to CYA. They gave me 30 days. I got out June 6, 2005 back to the same group home. I talked to my parole officer about transferring my parole to San Jose. I got a job and got into bad habits. I started smoking ice (crystal meth). I used everyday, staying awake for weeks at a time. Not to mention the pack of cigarettes I smoked everyday.

My health was bad and I didn't realize it 'till one day I took a picture with no shirt. I looked pale and you could see my ribs. It was nasty. So I stopped using ice and I tried to gain some weight back. January 7, 2006 I went to the marina to see some girl I met on an Internet site called myspace.com where everyone and their momma have. We were kicking it. Then we went to KFC. We ate. I went outside for a smoke and out of nowhere, the police started at me. In my mind I was thinking: I'm out of my county without permission I'm hella high on purple (weed), so I took the chance of running.

15-20 minutes later I gave up. I almost got tazzed by the cop. I don't know about you, I don't think 50,000 volts would feel good, and plus they had the dog after me. I went to Monterey County Jail, went to court and they gave me 30 days and an $850.00 fine for resisting arrest and trespassing. I called my P.O. and asked when he could transfer me back to CYA. He said when the detective is done with his investigation. I had no idea I was under investigation for armed robbery. What happened was I have a habit of dressing in all black at night. So when the cops were looking for the suspects, they assumed I was one of them, and when I ran, it made me look guilty.

February 16, 2006, was the day I came back to CYA for the last time. My jurisdiction ends July 3, 2006. We call it being maxed out, which means CYA has to let me out no strings. It's now the end of May. I only have 37 days left. I learned a lot in my time here in CYA. I just wish I used what I learned while I was on parole. I want to end this by saying sorry to all the people that I hurt in the past and I pray for forgiveness.

GUMESINDO RIVERA ***What a great day for The Beat Within. The sun is shining bright and interesting pieces are blossoming everywhere — even from this first time writer who really gives us something to think about. He challenges today's view of hip-hop and even gives a little information about how it was started. After doing that he suggests a few people worth emulating in our search to find a better way. After that he concludes with one of the best definitions we've heard of what it means to be a soldier. For you youngsters just beginning your experience with shackles and chains, this is a great piece to read. And for you old timers that have been doing this for a while, we're sure you'll agree with at least something he's talking about. He writes us from the California Correctional Facility in Tehachapi, CA. We appreciate good writing and people who take their ideas serious, so please don't hesitate to write some more. We can see that your creations need to be heard and we'll give you the platform as long as you keep writing.***

To The Beat Within

I just read through this magazine/book of voices. I'm very happy that the youth are not too afraid to question their surroundings, conditions, circumstances, and the intentions of other individuals within their community. At a young age one is susceptible to having his feelings, and emotions manipulated to bringing forth certain actions. As you grow you will come to take back a lot of control that you gave away. It's a sad thing when families are destroyed, this happens due to our own actions. We have to recognize those forces that try to teach you that stealing cars, robbing stores, selling or doing drugs, disrespecting yourself and your people, or dropping out of school is a good thing. Once we realize what this force is you can be aware of it and stay away from it.

One of these sources "commercial hip hop" has done nothing but added to the destruction of morals, dignity, and family values. I, in no way, am against hip-hop but there is the true form of hip-hop that is out there. This commercial hip-hop promotes gangsterism, thug livin', that women are good only for the thong videos, or for pimpin' and prostitution. It promotes you wear one color, the other wears another color and you have to fight or kill another. It speaks to you of selling dope. Moving kilos and making money, living dangerously and it tells you of the pain that you encounter for it but says, "oh, well! It's the life I chose, I just have to deal with it." You need to realize where and how hip-hop grew and transformed into what it is as we see it today.

You see back in the 80's President Reagan shut down a lot of school programs. After school programs, shut down schools, work was hard to get. Then an influx of cocaine came into the neighborhoods. Guns, wide spread prostitution, although this was present for a long time. This basically destroyed the communities. The black and brown — even the white and Asian. Yet the president told the world that everything was alright. This is when hip-hop took a firm step in expressing outrage, the conditions that we lived in and so forth. What was seen and what was being experienced. They rapped about it, but it was screaming for change. It was a political tool utilized by the "hoods" to communicate and organize and find common ground, but greedy individuals, the "industry", and other "corporations" seen how hip-hop motivated and helped shape the minds of the community. It's a culture, it was utilized and manipulated to what it is now. To sell products and get you to follow them. The big difference is that what was rapped about back then was about our situations, circumstances, and our social status, the conditions of our people to "wake up" for revolution, for liberation, for a birth of consciousness. Of whom you are and the power you possess to shape not only your lives, but the lives of your community.

I urge you with love, respect, and dignity. You must educate yourselves. You must be able to identify who you are in relation to the past. Study the history of the world. See what led up to the present. I challenge you to study and pay attention to what's being talked about in these songs being played over the radio. Challenge to think why it's called "Entertainment." Why fantasize about destroying yourself or your family, or your people? Who made this concept up? Why is it that people know this lifestyle is wrong? It does nothing but cause setbacks, keeps us ignorant and our families suffering and the people still do it? What is so entertaining about seeing your brother shot dead in the streets or your sister being pimped, raped, and immortalized? As if she doesn't have a brain or your dad back and forth to prison unable to kick his drug habits, unable to be your father and teach you, or your mother, the person who gave birth to you as a crack addict or a prostitute.

Nothing is entertaining about this, there are other forces out there, which will teach you that this is "ok" or "It's just the way it is, that it can't be changed or why even care, they don't care for you." While a lot of us "adults" have not done what we're supposed to do because of lack of courage, ignorance and so forth. There are those who seek to have you see yourself in a dignified way and to see another in the same respect. Who wish to educate you on what's right. Strive to learn about the people's champions of the past. Such as Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr, Assata Shakur, the civil rights movements of the past. The liberators, the organizations, which committed themselves to the community. Focus on the movements of the present — the world conditions harness your energy and put it forth to something beneficial for yourselves and for your families. Utilize your time in incarceration to change and develop good habits. So when you get out you'll have a stronger mind and a better resolve which can't be broken by "peer pressure".

Sure, there will be those "elements" whose goals might not be the same as yours and they may belittle you and attempt to take advantage of you or who may see your resolve to change and better yourself as weakness and try to assault you. Do what you need to do but don't risk getting more time because of issues stemming from "hurt pride." Do not lower yourself to conduct that contradicts that of what you're learning right now. If unfortunately, you do not have a release date, you can still be a big help to those around you. By being that guiding light (so to speak) steering others away from this trap door of gang violence, drugs, and destruction of yourself. It's a trap and sad to say not a lot of people make it out. Due to lack of knowledge, or 'cause they're afraid of what others might think.

Learn to embody the great personalities of the listed names I wrote. Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr, Assata Shakur, Che Guevara. Who will be the next great leader? It can be you. These people didn't do it for attention. They did what they did to help those around them, to encourage them to rise to even higher levels of love, and brotherhood. One of the keys to beginning this journey is to recognize that there is only one race — the human race. We are one family you must see the people as being a part of your family. The hard part is to deal with them. And another key I give to you what makes you a soldier is not your ability to throw punches, or talk the most crap, or pump fear in the hearts of the other individuals, or manipulate them. It's your ability to overcome obstacles, struggles, your ability to stay on your feet when you get backed into a corner and remain focused and steadfast despite the circumstances and conditions surrounding your struggle. This doesn't just make you a soldier. It turns you into a warrior.
For justice

PS. Please understand that the leaders I mentioned are just a few out of a long list. There are those who never made big headlines, yet are there in the community. Just waiting for the right youngster to come by to drop a positive seed. There are those who are looking for you right now. Who want to teach you, instruct you in the ways of the ancestors, the forefathers and the likes. It's only a matter of time before you connect and start learning.

Dear Beat

Hello to all the members of The Beat Within family. I'm writing you to give you guys some more of my poetry (which you probably already know) well here's some more I think should be purchased.

RICH BLACK **Writing from Contra Costa County Jail in Martinez, CA, Rich Balck aka Jamar begins with a letter to who we're assuming is his son. He uses a great metaphor with the idea of 'a blank page' and how you can fill it the way you want to. When we're born we start with a blank page and the life you choose to live will fill that page and even more pages — chapters. A great lesson to teach a growing boy with this cold world staring him directly in the face. Then he talks about 'hard times' and how he's 'built to survive'. After reading his writing, we can see why he's built to survive. Hopefully he'll continue to put it down for us, so that you will all have more information about how to survive. Let's see how he filled his blank page.**

I Can't

I once heard that cant shouldn't be in a man's vocabulary
So should I say, "Nothing can be done about it?"
Well there are some situations
Where you know can't is the only explanation.
Because I can't must mean I won't
And if I won't how will I know if I can't
So now my vocabulary has extended
When you are incarcerated you realize
I want to but I won't runaway
I can change and will make a difference in my life
Or I can be the same ignorant person who cuss out staff
Fight people for what they say, kick my door
And throw a big fit
Only to wake up and realize that I didn't and CAN'T do shhh
About my current situation
I can't has the three most important letters
In a man's vocabulary CAN
That's how I know I am a man.

Hard Times

It rains at this time
Out there with no type of shield
I survive hard times.

I'm going to make it
I'm going to do what I want to do
I'm going to be who I am
Because Ja'mar Washington is built to survive.

Mo' Time

Being in the wrong place at the wrong time
Get you to things
Serving time or the end of time

Every since the month you started to age
Even when I was inside a cage
Until the point where you can't age
Everything had a blank page
I added words
and now it has meaning to this page
When it was nothing more than a blank page

Built To Survive

Outside it's cold, but inside ain't no warmer
And whether I'm in or out. I'm getting older
The only difference between out and in is one degree colder
Out for me is in and in is out
Because if I get out I'm going to have to stay in
Because of what I've done
It seem like someone should care,
But the total of the ones who care are none
And if it's not the world on my shoulders, it's a least a ton
When I'm in jail I'm out
I just can't run about
And it doesn't do me any good to pout.
But if I'm in or out I got a family
That tells me who and what I'm going to be
When really they don't know shhh about me
I don't talk enough for you to know me on the inside
And when I'm out you barely know me because I'm always outside
So I keep saying to myself in a straight positive stride
The rest is on the other side.

A Blank Page

Dear Ja'mar III,
I'm going to tell you a little something about everything.
Don't tell Big Moma or Daddy if Papa slip and say a bad word.
You know to use condoms, get an education, and take responsibility.
So I'm gon' tell you what you need to know about a blank page.

A Blank Page
If you write a letter it's not a blank page
Since day one even before your month age
Everything has been a blank page
You can add meaning, feeling, action, humor
And then it's not a blank page.
Just as this was, but is no longer a blank page
It's the same with your life, for everyday has its own page.
Every since the month you started to age
Even when I was inside a cage
Until the point where you can't age
Everything had a blank page
I added words and now it has meaning to this page
When it was nothing more than a blank page
Everyday you age
And everyday you fill in a page
Because when you die hopefully because of old age
Where you go from there can no longer put you in a cage.
And just as you do any book they start from your first page
We experienced Ice Age
The Hurricane Katrina and earthquake in the city
Were the wind and earth age
GOD promised never again to do a Noah's ark,
Which is the water age
But those who didn't accept him
Cage or no cage will experience the fire age.
Life is a mess and then you age
Life isn't fair and then you age
You won't leave with everything a full page
But do your best not to leave with a blank page.
Love always,

it's easy to solve the problem when the problem ain't yours to solve. It's easy to make the different choice when that choice ain't yours to make.

check out the rest of William Grajeda's BWO piece on page 50